"I wouldn't teach any other grade": A case study of kindergarten teachers' work

by

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This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis.

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Whilst the nature of teachers' work in primary and secondary contexts has been the focus of considerable investigation, in the field of early childhood education, kindergarten teachers' work has been under researched. This has important implications for the field, specifically that the work of kindergarten teachers is not understood. Consequently, the work of kindergarten teachers is often under-valued and accorded a lower status than that of their colleagues in other teaching settings.

The study provides an in-depth examination of four kindergarten teachers' work with the aim of illustrating the complex and diverse nature of kindergarten teaching. A second aim of the study was to gain an understanding of how individuals came to teach in kindergarten, the roles that kindergarten teachers are required to adopt, and what it means to be a kindergarten teacher.

An ethnographic, narrative, case study approach to the research was adopted. Extensive observations and interviews of four kindergarten teachers working in government schools in northern Tasmania were employed to examine the nature of kindergarten teachers' work and the meaning of that work for these teachers.

Through this study, a framework for understanding the nature of kindergarten teachers' work emerged. The framework takes into account the personal, professional and social dimensions of kindergarten teachers' work. The findings associated with the personal dimension suggest that these participants entered the area of kindergarten education through serendipitous circumstances or opportunities. The participants described their work as hard although kindergarten teaching was also viewed as being rewarding and a privilege despite the low status and lack of understanding that had been associated with their work.

The professional dimension of kindergarten teachers' work revealed the participants were required to adopt diverse roles that can be divided into three broad categories; roles that reflect the purposes of kindergarten education such as introducing children and their families to formal schooling; roles that are related to specific aspects of kindergarten teachers' work which included the role of facilitator or social worker; and general roles such as being keeper of the peace or comforting children.

The participants in this study often worked in relative isolation from other teachers, senior members of staff and their school's principal. The findings of the study suggest that the social dimension was influenced by the physical design or location of the kindergarten classroom, timetable differences between the kindergarten and the rest of the school and kindergarten teachers' perceptions that their work is misunderstood by those not involved in kindergarten teaching.

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Chapter One – Introduction

I became interested in the area of kindergarten education during my undergraduate degree, specialising in early childhood education. Over the four years of my studies I became aware that teachers, the media and other students tended to view kindergarten teachers and the work that they undertake as being less important than the work undertaken by primary or secondary teachers. When I would tell people what I was studying at University they would laugh. I wondered, why? What was so amusing about a male wanting to work in the area of early childhood education? If my response was not met with laughter, I was looked at as though I were selling myself short, or that I had a more sinister motive for wanting to be around young children. During my internship, this became more apparent.

I had been placed on a prep class. I can still clearly remember the feeling I had when the parents came in on the first morning and looked me up and down. Perhaps the classroom was not for me, well not yet any way. I had completed my degree with honours and then applied for a scholarship to undertake a Doctor of Philosophy in Education. I am somewhat idealistic; I wanted to bring about some sort of change. I wanted people to appreciate what it is like to be a kindergarten teacher, to see it as more than playing games and cooking scones for morning tea, or a place where the children, and the teacher by implication, has "a nap time after lunch". These experiences served to fuel my interest in kindergarten teachers' work. I wanted to know what being a kindergarten teacher was like and what these teachers did on a daily basis. This was not the only aim that I had for the study; I also wanted to share with others what the work of these teachers was like so that they too may gain an appreciation that there is more to kindergarten teaching than tying shoelaces and wiping noses. It was through this process that I became immersed in the field of early childhood research.

Research in the field of early childhood education, an important field of study in its own right (Aubrey, David, Godfrey & Thompson, 2000), has been recognised as still being in its infancy when compared to other areas of educational research. There have been limited quantities of research conducted and published in the area of early childhood and kindergarten education that has focused specifically on the work of

the teacher (Genishi, Ryan, Ochsner & Yarnall, 2001; Peters, 1993). The volume of research in early childhood and kindergarten education is more sparse when the country of origin is considered. There have been few studies conducted and published in Australia that have focused specifically on the area of kindergarten education. Of those studies conducted, most tend to be dated. The relative dearth of such studies, have meant that many references included in this thesis relate to literature associated with primary teachers.

These low levels of research hold a number of implications for teachers and researchers alike. In the Tasmanian and Australian context of this study, kindergarten is concerned with the educational programs offered to four and five year old children. This is an important distinction, as in the United States of America the term kindergarten tends to be associated with the education of children who are five and six years of age. For this reason, findings stemming from studies conducted in the United States need to be viewed with a certain degree of caution as a one year difference sees significant change in developmental terms. It is also important to note that those studies conducted in countries such as the United States are not automatically applicable to the Australian or Tasmanian contexts. This is an important consideration because research is context specific, particularly when the organisational differences between these contexts are taken into account. An overview of kindergarten in Tasmania is provided in Chapter Two on pages 14 and 15 as well as a range of definitions of kindergarten (pp. 10 – 12).

There have been repeated calls for research that is applicable to Australian contexts and teachers, a point made by Ebbeck (1992) who has suggested that there is a real need to generate original research that has 'strong application for the Australian early childhood profession' (p. 81).

The absence of research examining early childhood and kindergarten teachers' work also has implications for teacher education programs. Hatton (1999) argued that teacher educators preparing teachers for Australian schools have little to go on in terms of the nature of day to day life in schools or how the different parties involved perceive contemporary practice. Research that addresses what occurs in kindergarten classrooms and illustrates the skills and understandings that teachers possess is

especially important as the early childhood profession is a 'distinctive, unique profession, which professes its own traditions, values, assumptions, experiences, practices and training' (Rodd, 1998, p. 154). It is for these reasons that early childhood teachers' work, or in the case of this study, kindergarten teachers' work must be examined specifically, rather than relying solely on research that has been carried out in primary settings or research that describes teaching in general.

A number of authors have suggested that the work of teachers in early childhood and kindergarten settings has been assigned significantly lower levels of status than the work of their colleagues who teach in other grade levels (Spencer, 2001; Ebbeck, 1992; Petrie, 1992; Stonehouse, 1991). The low status of teachers working in early childhood and kindergarten settings has also been attributed to the perception held by other teachers and the wider community that it is easy work and an extension of mothering (Fleer, 2000; Stonehouse, 1991). A range of reasons have been advanced to account for the low status assigned to kindergarten teaching, although the most common of these is that there is no established knowledge base for the field (Fleer, 2000; Petrie, 1992; Ott, Zeichner & Price, 1990). In this context, the term "knowledge base" refers to a readily accessible, clearly articulated body of literature that guides the practice of kindergarten and early childhood education.

The low status and lack of a knowledge base for the field has a number of implications for the field, particularly, recruiting high quality individuals to become kindergarten teachers because kindergarten has been viewed as an unattractive career option (Fleer, 2000). Through this study, I aim to provide detailed accounts of the nature of kindergarten teachers' work in order to educate readers about the importance of this type of work and expand the knowledge base of the field.

The perceived absence of a knowledge base in the field of kindergarten education also has ramifications for policy development and decision-making. Policies are formulated and decisions made about issues such as the kindergarten program, the hours of kindergarten attendance or the training requirements for kindergarten teachers with little or no reference to research (Karweit, 1992).

The absence of a knowledge base in the field of early childhood and kindergarten education is contested. Elbaz (1981) has suggested that there is an implicit knowledge base. Through this study, it may be possible to provide information associated with some of the areas outlined by Elbaz (1981) as being central to the knowledge base associated with the field. A concerted effort and systematic research is required to not only make such a knowledge base explicit, but also provide teachers with an opportunity to put forward their views related to this aspect of kindergarten teachers' work.

Research in early childhood and kindergarten settings has also tended to be undertaken by those with backgrounds in other, often unrelated, areas utilising quantitative rather than qualitative approaches to research (Aubrey et al, 2000; Browning & Hatch, 1995; Walsh, Tobin & Graue, 1993). Ebbeck (1992) has suggested that survey focused approaches to data collection have tended to dominate research in kindergarten settings. Walsh et al (1993) have suggested that:

> as researchers, we have measured people, but we have not listened to them. We have gone into classrooms and come out with little but numbers, as though the day to day interactions of human beings who spend large proportions of their waking hours in classrooms could be reduced to computations (p. 465).

This shortcoming, in terms of a lack of qualitative studies, has also been recognised by Nias (1989) who states that 'few attempts have been made to portray the subjective reality of teaching from the standpoint of, or in the words of, teachers themselves' (p. 19).

This study will provide a qualitative account of the nature of kindergarten teachers' work, providing the opportunity to understand kindergarten teaching from the perspective of the kindergarten teachers. A systematic, qualitative examination of the nature of kindergarten teachers' work will enable a depth of understanding to be gained, regarding the complexities and diversities of their work.

This study will not only provide an insight into the nature of kindergarten teachers' work, but will also move away from research that is quantitative in nature. This will allow the work of kindergarten teachers to be described and recreated for the reader

in rich detail while at the same time providing an insight into the personal meanings that kindergarten teachers attach to their work.

This study aims to interrogate the nature of kindergarten teachers' work in order to bring to light the complex and diverse nature of kindergarten teaching. Over the past two decades, substantial quantities of research projects have been undertaken in the area of teachers' work (For example, Dinham & Scott, 2000, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Huberman, 1993; Lieberman & Miller, 1992; Nias, 1989, 1987, 1986; Turney, Eltis, Towler & Wright, 1986; Elbaz, 1983, 1981; Lortie, 1975). However, primary and secondary teachers' work has often been the focus of these types of studies. Research has also been undertaken in relation to teachers' work in general as well as specific issues such as teachers' work in light of educational change (Abbott-Chapman, Hughes & Williamson, 2001; Fullan, 2001, 1996, 1993; Churchill, Williamson & Grady, 1997). These research projects have tended to describe what characteristics effective teachers should or do possess or the influence that educational change has on the work of teachers.

It could be argued that teaching kindergarten is no different to teaching in other primary school classrooms and that the existing body of knowledge related to teachers' work could be used to understand what kindergarten teaching is like. However, this is not a feasible means of gaining an understanding of nature of kindergarten teachers' work. The needs and interests of kindergarten children as well as the purposes of kindergarten education are so different from those associated with other forms of education that the work of kindergarten teachers needs to be examined specifically.

Abbott-Chapman et al (2001) have suggested that:

> Of course not all teachers are the same. They take up in the classroom a range of discursive positions which reflect their background, their training, their first school posting, and response to collegial and community culture, pedagogic philosophy and repertoire and pedagogic content knowledge (p. 172).

It is possible to infer from the passage outlined above, that kindergarten teachers, and subsequently their work would be different from other teachers because they have had different experiences and respond differently to a range of educational issues. For this reason it is vital that the work of kindergarten teachers is examined in its own right.

Gestwicki (1997) believes that the role of direct instruction is often the role that the wider society associates with teachers' work. This may contribute not only to the lack of understanding of what kindergarten teachers' work is like, but also the purpose of kindergarten and the ways in which young children are taught. The perception that teachers' work is characterised by direct instruction, according to Gestwicki, is a limiting and misleading image when the work of kindergarten teachers is considered because of the noticeable absence of formal, direct instruction in these settings for sustained periods of time. Through this study, it will be possible to address these views by providing detailed accounts of the nature of kindergarten teachers' work and their perceptions of this work.

The limiting and misleading images of kindergarten teaching that are portrayed in the media have also been recognised by Woodrow (1999) who argued that these views should not be readily accepted, suggesting that:

> in times of significant change like the present there is a tendency to work within the current definitions of the paradigms for childhood already enshrined in the media and our practices. Perhaps a more fruitful response might be to move outside these to adopt a more critical perspective informed by fresh insight on taken for granted assumptions and constructions of our field (p. 11).

To this aim, could be added that in changing times, the role of the kindergarten teacher should also be interrogated, resulting in fresh insights that are free from the stereotypical and historically inaccurate representations of the work kindergarten teachers carry out.

In order to satisfy the aims of the study and to guide its subsequent development, the following research question was developed:

- What is the nature of kindergarten teachers' work?

The nature of kindergarten teachers' work is a broad concept to investigate. In order, to provide a more focused and systematic approach to the study, six subsidiary research questions were developed:

- What attracts individuals to work in the area of kindergarten education?
- What aspects of their work do kindergarten teachers find rewarding?
- What aspects of their work do kindergarten teachers find challenging?
- How do kindergarten teachers perceive their role?
- How do kindergarten teachers describe their work?
- What type of program do kindergarten teachers offer?

The study is qualitative in its orientation and draws on elements of ethnography, case study and narrative approaches to research. In order to generate data that provides insight into the study's research question, the study employed observations and interviews. The use of observations provided the opportunity to observe the work of kindergarten teachers in a direct and natural manner (Adler & Adler, 1998). In addition, a series of individual interviews were also conducted with each kindergarten teacher. The interviews were undertaken using a modified version of the three-part interview process advocated by Seidman (1998).

The sample for the study was selected using purposive and convenience sampling techniques. The study sought variety in terms of the Economic Needs Index (ENI) of the school, the experience and the gender of the teachers. The application of the sampling techniques resulted in four kindergarten teachers being selected to participate in the study. Following this, I negotiated access at each school and its kindergarten. Observations were conducted at each site during the 2001 school year and were recorded in the form of fieldnotes. The use of observations also provided me with the opportunity to establish a rapport with each of the teachers before the interviews were conducted. I conducted a series of interviews with each teacher,

which were subsequently transcribed. The observations in the form of fieldnotes and the interviews that had been rendered into transcripts represented the two forms of data that were utilised in the study. The data were transformed using three broad processes, which included description, analysis and interpretation.

In chapter two, a general orientation to kindergarten education is provided. This is achieved through an examination of the how kindergarten has been defined as well as its purposes and history. In addition, the review of literature focuses on research associated with teachers' work generally as well as early childhood and kindergarten teachers' work specifically.

The third chapter of this thesis provides a detailed account of the methodology and data collection techniques that were applied during the course of the study. In this chapter, the process of data analysis and issues associated with the presentation of each teacher's experiences are revealed.

The fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh chapters present the data obtained through the conduct of the observations and interviews. These chapters are characterised by detailed accounts of the experiences of each of the four kindergarten teachers who participated in the study. The chapters are structured around a day or session in the respective classroom of each kindergarten teacher. It is through these chapters that the kindergarten experience is recreated, providing the reader with a valuable insight into what it is like to teach in a kindergarten classroom.

In chapter eight, an interpretation of the data that has been generated and collected through the qualitative methods and techniques applied in the study is presented. In this chapter, I propose an alternate perspective through which the nature of kindergarten teachers' work can be examined. I have also provided a number of recommendations related specifically to each of the aspects addressed in this chapter.

The end of the thesis is marked by an epilogue. It is in this space that I provide an insight into the nature of kindergarten teachers' work from my perspective. The epilogue concludes with an overview of future directions for research in the areas of kindergarten education and kindergarten teachers' work.

The importance of early education is largely recognised and generally not contested within the realms of educational research although the teachers who work in this area have been ignored, held in low esteem and marginalised (Mahmood, 2000; Kendall, 1992; Smith, 1991). Through this study, I endeavour to illuminate the nature of kindergarten teachers' work thereby helping to make others more knowledgeable about what occurs in kindergarten classrooms on a daily basis. I also hope that through this process I shall be able to act as an advocate for what is important about kindergarten education and the work that teachers do.

Chapter Two - Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to explore kindergarten teachers' work in order to gain an understanding of the particular characteristics of work in this field. The initial intention of this chapter is to provide a general orientation to kindergarten education by investigating various perceptions associated with kindergarten and its development. Following this, the chapter contextualises the study's research question through an examination of teachers' work with a specific focus on research conducted in early childhood and kindergarten contexts.

2.2 Perceptions of Kindergarten

Within the literature, there are a number of differing points of view as to what constitutes kindergarten with the term and purpose of kindergarten being perceived in varying ways. Kindergarten has been described as: transition from home; an introduction to schooling; and, a particular program of study. However, perhaps the earliest description and purpose of kindergarten was associated with the socialisation of children.

Throughout much of its early history generally as well as in Australia specifically, one purpose of kindergarten was to counter the disadvantage of children living in inner city areas and to socialise the children of the poor into the dominant culture (Clyde, 2000; Cuthill, Reid & Hill, 1998; Spearitt, 1979). While the purposes of kindergarten as a way of socialising children in general has been recognised by Cuthill et al (1998) they argue that the purposes of such prior-to-school programs, remain ambiguous. Traditional programs provided by preschools and kindergarten emphasised socialisation of the child rather than academic preparation for school, a view also recognised by Moyer (2001).

The kindergarten teacher was promoted as being able to bring about greater benefits than parents alone. In addition, Cuthill et al (1998) believe that the time spent separated from parents was also seen as a beneficial outcome for the kindergarten attendee. Dombkowski (2001) argues that while the 'social benefits of kindergarten were apparent, the long-term academic benefits of kindergarten attendance remained unclear' (p. 531).

While kindergarten education and its purposes have undergone a number of changes to reflect new knowledge of children and learning as well as the needs of the communities they served (Brosterman, 1997; Spodek, 1986), Wollons (2000) has argued that one thing has remained clear, 'the sub text of the kindergarten curriculum was not only to nurture and enhance the natural stages of development, but also to influence national values and family practices' (p.5). The notion of kindergarten being used for urban social reform is recognised by a number of authors who have reviewed the history and development of kindergarten not only in Australia but also in other countries (Clyde, 2000; Wollons, 2000; Spearitt, 1979). In early childhood and kindergarten programs developed since the 1960's, social reform and an attempt to equalise the effects of disadvantage are still common although subtle purposes of the programs (Genishi et al, 2001).

Kindergarten has also been viewed as a way through which children can make the transition from home to school. Spodek (1986) has suggested that kindergarten is 'the young child's introduction to education outside the home. Attending kindergarten served to ease the transition from home to school' (p. vii).

When kindergarten is perceived as an introduction to formal schooling, it has been defined as 'the important beginning of a child's school experience' (Heffernan & Todd, 1960, p. 3). In a similar manner, kindergarten has been defined by Ebbeck (1991) as an 'educational setting established mainly to provide one year of education before children begin formal schooling' (p. 3), highlighting the introductory nature of kindergarten in terms of a child's schooling. The kindergarten is also considered as a means of equipping children with necessary skills to succeed in their primary education, and as a means of providing children with a common experience that they may not receive at home (Spodek, 1986).

Others recognise the purpose of kindergarten as being an orientation to formal schooling (Moyer, 2001; Kostelnik, Soderman and Phipps Whirren, 1993) a purpose that remains relevant in today's schools.

Finally, kindergarten has been perceived as a particular program of study:

> ... as a service provided for children on a sessional basis, usually two to four hours per day for three to five days per week. The service is typically provided for the child during the year just prior to primary school (Plummer, 1979, p. 286).

The term "kindergarten", or in its translated form "child garden" (Shapiro, 1983) was one that Froebel thought captured the essential elements of kindergarten. The kindergarten was to be a place where children could congregate and interact with peers without the constraints of their families or the school. In addition, the protective nature of the kindergarten would ensure that children were able to learn in a safe environment, free from the 'corrupting influence of society and the dangers of nature' (Shapiro, 1983, p. 22). Wollons (2000) has also taken a similar view of kindergarten, suggesting that kindergarten is 'the institution originating in Germany in the mid nineteenth century, based on Friedrich Froebel's theory of child development' (p. 2).

An alternate perspective on the purpose of kindergarten can be gained by examining parents' perceptions about the purposes of kindergarten. A recent study that examined the expectations of Victorian parents in regard to the purpose of kindergarten education amongst other aspects, found that parents perceived the primary aims of kindergarten to be the children's socio-emotional development (39.6%), school readiness (24.4%), and the development of educational or academic skills (12.8%) (Page, Nienhuys, Kapsalakis and Morda, 2001). These perceptions matched the actual reasons that parents sent their children to kindergarten. Socio-emotional development was cited by 23.3% of parents as the main reason for sending children to kindergarten, whilst 21.3% gave school readiness reasons, only 5.7% of parents provided academic development reasons.

The study also examined what parents gained personally as a result of their child attending kindergarten. Page et al (2001) found that as a result of children attending kindergarten, parents gained a sense of satisfaction that their child's needs were being met (30.5%); they developed friendships (26.2%) and also had access to information and support (20.1%). These findings suggest that the work that kindergarten teachers undertake is of benefit not only to kindergarten children but also to their families.

In the context of this study, kindergarten is considered to be a program to facilitate the transition of children from the home to formal schooling. In addition, kindergarten is also considered to be a program through which children are provided with a range of experiences with the intention of helping them develop academically, socially, emotionally and physically.

2.3 A Brief Historical Overview of Kindergarten in Australia

In Australia, educators imported kindergarten education practice largely from the United States (Wollons, 2000; Ashby & Grieshaber, 1996), although the latter authors acknowledge the influence of teachers working in Europe. Nyland (2001) suggests that through exchange programs where Australian teachers studied overseas, 'America and England were strong influences on early childhood philosophy, theory and practice' (p. 8), in Australia.

The kindergarten movement began to flourish in Australia and in the years from 1910 to 1927, the number of kindergartens had increased from 32 to 71. In fact, by 1916 every state in Australia had established a Kindergarten Union or Kindergarten Association. The number of enrolments also rose sharply, doubling in size from 1800 to 3600. Tasmania, the only non-mainland state of Australia, was established originally as a convict colony, and had a history of government controlled human services unique in Australia. It was not until 1910 that the Kindergarten Union was established in Tasmania (Clyde, 2000; Spearitt, 1979).

Historically, there has been considerable variation as to what constitutes kindergarten education in Australia, with each state and territory having varying terms and age

requirements for what is referred to as kindergarten. This was recognised by Plummer as early as 1979 when she suggested that there was variation, not only from state to state but, also across each of the agencies responsible for the provision of education for preschool services. The varied nature of kindergarten programs has also been recognised by Clyde (2000), Wollons (2000), Cuthill et al (1998) and Spearitt (1979). The variation of kindergarten programs remains.

The Department of Education and Training in Western Australia (2003) provides a comparison of kindergarten attendance options for children two years before formal schooling attendance is required which demonstrates the variation that still exists in kindergarten education throughout Australia.

Table 2.1 Kindergarten Attendance Options

State/Territory (Provider)	Entry Age	Name of Program + Hours of Attendance	Compulsory Starting Age
Western Australia (Department of Education)	4 by 30th June	Kindergarten 5hrs 30mins a week	The beginning of the school year in which the child reaches the age of 6 and 6 months
New South Wales	4 by 31st July	Pre-school 10hrs a week	6th Birthday
Victoria	4 by 30th April	Pre-school 10hrs a week	6th Birthday
Queensland	4 by 31st December	Kindergarten Up to 12hrs 30mins a week	6th Birthday
South Australia	Continuous entry after 4th birthday	Kindergarten 10hrs 30mins a week	6th Birthday
Northern Territory	Continuous entry after 4th birthday	Pre-school 12hrs a week	6th Birthday
Tasmania	4 by 1st January in year of entry	Kindergarten 10hrs a week	6th Birthday
ACT	4 by 30th April in year of entry	Pre-school 10hrs 30mins a week	6th Birthday

The Tasmanian Department of Education (2002) provides kindergarten programs to children who are four years of age on or by the 1st January in the year of their admission. Children who are younger than the minimum age can also be enrolled in kindergarten if they have been categorised as gifted or if they have been enrolled in kindergarten in another state or territory of Australia.

In Tasmania, kindergarten teachers are required to provide children with 10 hours of kindergarten per week in either full day or half-day sessions (Department of

Education, 2002). While it has not been stipulated in formal policy, The Department of Education (2002) has suggested that the maximum number of children for a full time kindergarten teacher should not exceed 46, which in practice, translates to two groups of 23 children. There are approximately 5414 children enrolled in kindergarten in Tasmanian government schools (Tasmanian Department of Education, 2001).

2.4 Research in Early Childhood and Kindergarten Education

There have been a number of reviews of research conducted in the areas of early childhood and kindergarten education (Genishi et al, 2001; Nyland, 2001; Browning & Hatch, 1995; Peters, 1993). A noticeable absence in these reviews is the study of kindergarten teachers and their work.

The lack of research in this regard has been recognised by Peters (1993) who has argued that 'there are few empirical studies in the literature, when compared to studies done on other levels of education, that directly address theoretical and practical questions about teachers and teaching within early childhood classrooms' (p. 493). This view is also reiterated by Genishi et al (2001) eight years later suggesting that little has changed in the field, particularly in the area of research into teachers' work. Further, it has also been recognised that a limited number of studies that are qualitatively orientated and conducted by researchers who have a background in the area have been undertaken (Browning & Hatch, 1995; Walsh, et al, 1993).

In their review of early childhood research, Genishi et al (2001) demonstrated that research focused on: staff development programs, teaching of subject matter; teaching for social competence; teacher planning; teacher beliefs; teacher's theories; behavioural and environmental focus; teachers collaborating with others; teachers and academics collaborating; and teachers writing for themselves (pp. 1179 – 1196).

A review of qualitative research conducted in early childhood settings was undertaken by Browning and Hatch (1995). The review focused on research that explored: the relationship between kindergarten teachers' philosophies and their

professional practice (Hatch & Freeman, 1988); readiness for kindergarten (Graue, 1993); kindergarten teachers' beliefs and practices related to readiness and retention (Smith & Shepard, 1988); retention (Smith, 1989); the aesthetics of a Writing to Read program (Huenecke, 1992); literacy instruction (Dyson, 1985); and children's peer interactions (Hatch, 1989, 1988, 1987a, 1987b).

In order to review research undertaken in early childhood settings, Peters (1993) generated broad categories of research questions that had been addressed. These included: Demographic (the number of children and teachers involved in early childhood education); Status/Characteristics questions (the characteristics of early childhood teachers as well as the field); Process questions (the examination of behaviour or teaching programs in early childhood and the subsequent outcomes for students); Developmental questions (the change or otherwise of individuals, families, organisations or systems).

A review of published material in the *Australian Journal of Early Childhood* over a forty year period undertaken by Nyland (2001) showed that a great deal of research tended to focus on the image of the child. The move of women into the work force and the subsequent need for childcare coupled with day care and its relationship to kindergarten were also matters that received attention. During the years 1970 – 1990, Nyland (2001) suggested that research tended to focus on children with special needs, transition from home to school and childcare issues. In addition, 'the threat to early childhood ideals from educational philosophies of the primary school and an emphasis on directed learning was frequently expressed' (Nyland, 2001, pp. 11 – 12).

In each of the reviews of research that have been examined in this section, kindergarten teachers and their work have received little attention. In addition, the bulk of the research that has been conducted in kindergarten contexts tends to be dated. There is a real need for research that is focused on kindergarten teachers' work and conducted in qualitative ways by those with an understanding of the field. In the following section, a general examination of teachers' work is provided.

2.5 Teachers' Work

The concept of teachers' work has been the focus of substantial quantities of research projects (for example, Dinham & Scott, 2000, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Huberman, 1993; Lieberman & Miller, 1992; Nias, 1989, 1987, 1986; Turney et al, 1986; Elbaz, 1983, 1981; Lortie, 1975). The literature associated with teachers' work is extensive, with large proportions of the work focusing on educational change and its impact on teachers' work (Fullan, 2001, 1996, 1993; Abbott-Chapman et al, 2001; Churchill et al, 1997; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992). However, it is surprising that what teachers do on a day-to-day basis in the classroom has been overlooked to a certain extent. Indeed, over this time little consideration has been given to the notion put forward by Eisner (1991) who suggests: 'It does not seem particularly revolutionary to say that it is important to try to understand how teachers and classrooms function before handing out recommendations for change' (p.11).

Stamopoulos (1998) suggests that 'differences exist between early childhood education and primary school education' (p. 26). These differences are also recognised by Hargreaves (1994) who argues that early childhood teachers perceive their work differently to primary and secondary teachers. The differences that exist between the work of kindergarten teachers and their colleagues could also be attributed to the personal experiences of each teacher in terms of their training and the philosophical and pedagogical knowledge they possess (Abbott-Chapman et al, 2001).

Katz and Goffin (1990) believe that early childhood teachers share one common aim with their colleagues who teach in primary and secondary settings, that is to help students acquire certain knowledge. However, they emphasise that while there are similarities there are also substantial differences that exist between early childhood teachers and those who teach at other levels. They state that 'these variations can be attributed to factors linked to the age and experience of the learners, the particular organisational contexts in which early childhood teachers work, and the distinction between early childhood and other levels of education' (p. 192). If this is the case for early childhood teachers collectively, then it is likely, given the distinctive characteristics of age and experience of kindergarten children and the organisational

contexts of kindergarten, that there will be substantial differences when the work of kindergarten teachers is compared to their early childhood and primary counterparts.

This is further commented on by Fleet (2002) who recognises the difficulties associated with teaching in the area of early childhood education and states that 'there are few constancies about adult work in early childhood settings. We are all aware that we are working in changing and unpredictable times' (p. 18). Kindergarten teachers carry out their work 'in a value-laden and politically affected context' (Fleet & Patterson, 1998, p. 33).

Teaching in a kindergarten classroom is very different to teaching children in early childhood grades of primary school because of the needs of kindergarten children in terms of the support and guidance they require in all areas of their development (Dombkowski, 2001; Branscombe, Castle, Dorsey, Surbeck & Taylor, 2000). These differences in needs are highlighted by Moyer (2001) who states that 'assigning primary and upper elementary teachers to the kindergarten is a questionable practice – indeed, it is cause for great concern' (p. 165) as there is a lack of understanding of the requirements of working in a kindergarten classroom, that simply modifying a primary school curriculum do not accommodate. This could be attributed partly to the perception held by kindergarten teachers that 'kindergarten was not only *different* from the primary grades, they thought that kindergarten pedagogy was *better* than that of the primary grades' (Dombkowski, 2001, p. 529).

The inappropriateness of providing kindergarten children with modified primary school curricula is also recognised by Kostelnik et al (1993) who suggest that in order to ensure that this does not occur, kindergarten teachers need specialised knowledge and skills.

Teaching, and a subsequent profession in education, is not a nine to five job. This is recognised by Nias (1989) who suggests that teachers are in a position where their professional and personal lives are inextricably intertwined. This could be part of the reason that teachers' work, as an entity, is difficult to define. That is, the nature of teachers' work is defined by the individuals who carry it out on a daily basis. This view is recognised by Lieberman and Miller (1992) who suggest that secondary

teacher's identities are linked to the subjects that they teach, they are teachers of English, mathematics or science. These teachers according to Lieberman and Miller (1992) also tend to congregate in group according to the subjects they teach, resulting in isolation from the rest of the school. If this were the case, the work of primary and secondary teachers, and the work of kindergarten teachers could be defined in different ways. However, it is difficult to ascertain whether this is the case, given that the teachers in early childhood or kindergarten settings have had limited involvement in research of this nature.

2.6 Teachers' Beliefs

The teacher is a key factor in what happens in any early childhood setting as 'each teacher is a collection of personal and professional selves created by a combination of experiences and beliefs that contribute to each situation' (Fleet & Patterson, 1998, p. 32). Research demonstrates that teachers' beliefs greatly influence their educational practice (Wood & Bennett, 2000; Elbaz, 1983, 1981; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Apple & King, 1977; Bernstein, 1975; Berlak, Berlak, Bagnatos & Midel, 1975). When examining teachers' work, the beliefs that teachers' hold are an important consideration given the influence they have on what occurs in the classroom.

Given the influence that teachers' beliefs have on their practice, they are an important consideration when examining teachers work

Research in the area of teacher thinking has become more important as researchers have acknowledged the role that teachers' mental and cognitive lives play in developing an understanding of teaching in its broader sense. Wood and Bennett (2000) have suggested that a recognition of the role of teachers' theories has led to a broadened view of teaching that includes teachers' mental lives as integral to the teaching process. An understanding of the beliefs held by teachers is also important because the work of teachers requires an investment of a personal nature, something that is less common in other professions. This is recognised by Nias (1989) who talks of the "connectedness" between the personal and professional lives of teachers.

Research into teachers' beliefs has been undertaken in a number of different ways, utilising both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. While this has created a wealth of rich data that provides insight into the area of teachers' beliefs, the terms that have been used to address this issue are numerous. Pajares (1992) suggests this has led to teachers' beliefs being viewed as a messy construct. Teachers' beliefs have been examined using terms such as: "teachers' personal practical theories" (Clandinin and Connelly, 1986); "practical theories" (Handal and Lauvas, 1987); "teachers' strategic knowledge" (Shulman, 1987, 1986); "practical knowledge" (Elbaz, 1981); "teacher perceptions" (Goodman, 1988) and "implicit theories" (Clark, 1988).

Descriptions are sparse about how early childhood and kindergarten teachers go about their teaching and how their beliefs and values find expression in the ways that they educate young children (Yonemura, 1986). However, we do know that 'teachers have assumptions about curriculum that relate to issues of quality, integrated development, the role of play, teachers' philosophy and practice, children's development, children as learners, and developmentally appropriate practice...' (Catron & Allen, 1999, p. 15). The research literature is generally sparse with descriptions of kindergarten teachers' work and how the teachers perceive themselves and their work.

Teachers' beliefs provide an organisational framework that serves as a guide for classroom decision-making and the actions that result from such decisions (Elbaz, 1983). Spodek (1988b), King (1978) and Bernstein (1975) found that the practice of early childhood teachers strongly reflected their beliefs about children and learning.

The vast array of studies that have been conducted on teachers' thinking and beliefs (for example, see Clark and Peterson's (1986) meta-analysis of research in this field) has demonstrated that there is no one set of commonly held beliefs shared by teachers. In a study conducted by Eisenhart, Cuthbert, Shrum and Harding (1988), teachers' attitudes towards various aspects of their work were examined in order to determine whether teachers shared widely held beliefs about their work. The findings of the study suggested that while teachers shared beliefs about aspects of their work which were directly related to classroom activities such as fostering student success

and creating educationally sound learning environments, there were fewer commonly held beliefs associated with activities outside the classroom such as curriculum development.

The disparity among beliefs can be attributed in part to the diversity in early childhood teacher education programs or it may be a reflection of the individual nature of teaching such as that described by Lortie (1975) and Nias (1989). More recently, Timperely and Robinson (2000) have suggested that the diversity of teachers' beliefs may be attributed to the 'relative independence of operation' of teachers. Difference in the beliefs held by teachers has also been attributed to their personal traits. This view is supported by Lazarius and Folkman (1984), when they suggested that 'the potential for personal traits to shape or colour teacher's perceptions is especially great' (p. 509). Teachers do differ in the content of their practical theories, they hold different values and believe different things, regardless of how they develop their ideas (Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

Spodek (1988a) conducted a study to determine whether there was a range of beliefs that are shared among a cohort of nine early childhood teachers. The findings of Spodek's study suggest that the beliefs held by the teachers varied considerably from one teacher to another. While the majority of teachers held a range of separate beliefs, they did share one common category of beliefs that was associated with classroom management issues. In the discussion of findings Spodek (1988a) poses the question that if so many of the implicit theories underlying the teachers' classroom decisions were related to values and were concerned with the process of management of classroom activities there was a need to consider the foundations of early childhood educational practice. While the study is somewhat dated, little research has been undertaken that either confirms or negates the common beliefs held by early childhood teachers as being primarily concerned with management issues.

Yonemura (1986) conducted a study with one early childhood teacher with the intention of determining the teacher's thoughts and beliefs about teaching, educational programs and the impact of those beliefs on young children. Yonemura

(1986) found that the teacher's actions in the classroom could be traced back to the values and beliefs that the teacher held in relation to a particular aspect of teaching.

Ball (1994) developed twelve principles of practice that underpin learning within the context of early childhood education. The principles include: a belief that early childhood is the foundation on which children build the rest of their lives; the notion that children develop at different rates; a belief that all children have abilities that can (and should be) identified and promoted; a belief that young children should learn from everything that happens to them and around them and that this learning should proceed from what they are able to do, rather than what they are not able to do. More specifically, learning is not separated into different subject or disciplines. This has implications for the way in which children are taught. The principles developed by Ball (1994) could be viewed as an example of the types of beliefs that kindergarten teachers would or do hold in relation to kindergarten and their work as kindergarten teachers.

Teachers' beliefs are closely related to their thinking and decision-making. The decisions that teachers make in the classroom reflect their thinking and the norms, values and beliefs that they possess. Damon (1992) has suggested that all educational choices reflect values. It is for these reasons an understanding of teachers' beliefs, thinking and decision-making is important elements for understanding teachers' work.

Common reference points for teachers in their thinking about their work and the subsequent decisions that they make, are students and their characteristics (McLaughlin, 1993). Robinson and Jones-Diaz (1999) take this view a step further and suggest that teachers working in the area of early childhood education maintain that an understanding of children's development and growth and a central focus on the individual is 'a fundamental and necessary requirement underlying their daily work' (p. 34).

Teachers' thinking about their work tends to be less influenced by policy, innovations and educational theory (Hargreaves, 1994; Sachs & Smith, 1988) and more by their own views about how they might best respond to the students in their

care (McLaughlin, 1993). However, in terms of teachers' thinking and beliefs, and the subsequent decisions that they make, Miller (2000) asserts that teachers working within the context of early childhood education need to take a 'critical stance in relation to theory and practice' (p. 28). Within this context, theory is taken to mean the rationale behind a teacher's classroom practice or decision-making. Lally (1995) suggests that teachers who cannot give answers to the "why" questions about their practice will be weak on rationale and therefore vulnerable to outside pressures which may influence the nature of their work.

Schmidt, Porter, Floden, Freeman and Schwille (1987) suggest that it is important to realise that content decisions are not made without influence. The influence occurs because teachers do not operate in a vacuum and external pressures can take the form of curriculum materials, parents, senior staff, textbooks and other teachers (p. 440). The influence of external factors is also recognised by Brophy (1982) who believes that the decisions that teachers make are influenced not only by outside factors (such as policy, curriculum documents or school requirements) but also by internal pressures (such as their own knowledge and beliefs and their assessments of the benefits and costs of content alternatives). The role of values and beliefs in shaping teachers' decision making and subsequently the nature of their work is also recognised by Nias (1989) who believes that 'the self is a crucial element in the way teachers themselves construe the nature of their job' (p. 13).

More recently, Beijaard, Verloop and Vermut (2000) found, as a result of a study which aimed to investigate teachers' perceptions of their own professional identity, that teachers' judgements and behaviour were influenced by their perceptions and predispositions, as well as a number of other factors including; experience, context and their own biographies.

The analysis of literature associated with teachers' beliefs suggests that beliefs are one of the factors that shape teachers' work. In addition, individual teachers' beliefs are closely linked to the thinking and decision-making processes of teachers. The beliefs that individual teachers hold are also thought to vary when compared to the beliefs held by other teachers. The apparent disparity in the beliefs held by teachers

has been attributed to the individualised nature of teaching and the freedom that working in an isolated classroom provides.

Limited research has focused specifically on the beliefs and practices of kindergarten teachers. Consequently, little is known of kindergarten teachers' beliefs in relation to their work or if these beliefs are consistent or otherwise with the beliefs held by other kindergarten teachers. This study seeks to investigate the teaching lives of four kindergarten teachers in order to gain an understanding of the nature of these teachers' work, and their beliefs about kindergarten teaching.

2.7 Why Teach?

In an attempt to better understand the nature of teachers' work, it is relevant to explore individuals' reasons for entering the teaching profession. As an area of research, the motivation to join the teaching profession has been of interest to scholars for the better part of 25 years. In his seminal work *School Teacher*, Lortie (1975) presented five main reasons that individuals are drawn to the teaching profession. The attractors include contact with young people on a daily basis, a perception that teaching is of great service to society, a chance to continue interests in a particular subject area, access to material benefits such as money, prestige and employment security and finally, the time available for pursuing other interests and responsibilities such as parenting (pp. 27-32). Lortie (1975) also found that the individuals' decisions to enter the teaching profession were also influenced by family members who were teachers. Lortie has revisited the findings of *School Teacher* (1998; 2002), concluding that 'education does not change at a rapid pace – the major structures in public education are much the same today as when *School Teacher* was written...' (p. vii).

In a later study of secondary teachers, Huberman (1993) found that the teachers tended to offer three main reasons for entering the profession. First, in terms of the teacher's initial motives for entering teaching, gaining a sense of satisfaction or pleasure from contact with young people was one of the most important attractions. Second, participants in Huberman's study identified the opportunity provided by teaching to continue their connection with a subject area they were interested in. The third most common reason put forward by the teachers related to the opportunity that

teaching afforded to earn a living and achieve financial independence (Huberman, 1993, pp. 113 – 119).

Morales (1994) undertook a study to determine the reasons that education majors had chosen a career in education. The study showed that the two most common reasons for entering the teaching profession were a fulfilment for the need for service and the need for power, power to influence people. Of particular interest is the similarity between these results and the results obtained by Lortie (1975) nearly twenty years earlier, suggesting that the reasons people enter the teaching profession have not changed considerably over that period.

In research conducted by Alexander, Chant and Cox (1994) they found that individuals tended to enter the teaching profession because they possessed the "right personality". In addition, Alexander et al (1994) found that individuals entered the teaching profession because they enjoyed the experience of schooling as well as a desire to share their knowledge. They concluded that:

> even in the days of reduced professional options, people will continue to seek work which is personally fulfilling, safe and adequately paid in the eyes of applicants. Few jobs offer these qualities more than teaching (p. 47).

Dinham and Scott (1996) conducted a large scale survey as part of the Teacher 2000 project that aimed to build upon understandings of aspects of teachers' work such as satisfaction and teachers' values. As part of this project, 892 primary and secondary teachers were surveyed. Teachers were asked to indicate whether seven orientations to teaching were true for them. They found that nearly half of the participants (49%) had always wanted to be teachers. A large number of participants (40%) also indicated that the potential for teaching as a career to fit in with family commitments was a key factor in their decision to become a teacher. Other motivations to enter the teaching profession also included an attraction to the hours and holidays offered by teaching (20%); a lack of other options (20%); pressure from family members (13%); and finally, salary (10%).

In addition, Dinham and Scott (1996) also examined a number of satisfiers and dissatisfiers in relation to the work of teachers, and found that the study confirmed:

> the existence of three broad levels of satisfiers / dissatisfiers experienced by school staff; the universal intrinsic rewards of teaching...a middle band of school based factors such as leadership and decision making processes, school climate, and school infrastructure, about which school staff tend to be ambivalent and where variation from school to school occurred; and societal, community and employer based factors, which school staff tend to find universally dissatisfying (p. 60).

Several of these features are worthy of further examination. The main satisfier was found to be students achieving some form of success which was identified by 98% of respondents as being satisfying. Further, half of the respondents were satisfied with those aspects of their work which involved working with students experiencing problems at home (Dinham & Scott, 1996).

In terms of the dissatisfiers, Dinham and Scott (1996) found that teachers tended to be dissatisfied with how teachers were portrayed by the media and also how the community did not appreciate the varied nature of their work. In addition, teachers were dissatisfied with those aspects of their work in which they were required to take on parenting and social work roles. However, Dinham and Scott (1996) did not differentiate between primary and secondary teachers in this instance.

Focusing specifically on early childhood teachers, Cockburn (2000) conducted a study with twelve teachers using semi-structured interviews to examine the retention and recruitment of early childhood teachers and their reasons for entering the teaching profession. She found that five of the teachers had entered the profession because it was something that they had always wanted to do. Three of the teachers had other jobs before entering teaching. Two had initially wanted to teach and after a period of uncertainty became teachers, while the remaining teachers had tried to pursue other professions and when this did not eventuate opted for teaching. Cockburn (2000) also examined the reasons that teachers enjoyed their work. Eight of the teachers cited contact with children as an enjoyable element of their work, as progress of the children was found to be a main source of enjoyment for the teachers. Satisfaction associated with working with colleagues or other adults was also

demonstrated as eleven of the twelve teachers said that contact with colleagues contributed a "great deal" (p. 228) to their enjoyment of teaching.

In a similar manner, mid-career teacher participants in a study conducted by Nias (1989) indicated that they enjoyed contact with colleagues which she believes may point to professional satisfaction from "relating to adults rather than (or, as well as) children" (p. 95). In addition, Nias (1989) found that teachers were satisfied with their work because: they liked children; they liked being with children both in and outside of school; children had more appealing characteristics than adults in the sense that they were more honest, enthusiastic, and spontaneous. Further, the development or progress that children make was a major source of job satisfaction for the teachers involved in Nias' (1989) study. In addition, teachers also found the profession itself and the holidays it offered satisfying. The unpredictability and variety associated with teaching was also an aspect that teachers found satisfying. There was a distinction made between teaching children (which was not intellectually stimulating) as opposed to thinking about teaching children (which was intellectually stimulating) (Nias, 1989). Nias (1989) found that the teachers in her study liked the freedom that they experienced in their classroom, with the teachers talking about freedom in a manner that was more closely aligned with variety. That is, if they wanted to do something or the children wanted to do something that was not planned, the new direction could be accommodated.

Nias (1989) asked the teachers to identify several aspects of their work which they disliked doing and to provide reasons for the response. There was a feeling among some of the teachers that teaching was a total package and even though some aspects of the work proved to be dissatisfying, they could not be separated from the other aspects of the job. For example, working with colleagues and other adults, while satisfying for some teachers, proved to be dissatisfying for others. Nias (1989) found that teachers were dissatisfied with working with uncongenial colleagues, and dealing with unresponsive parents. In addition, the teachers also found conflict with their principals, the teaching profession's status and a perceived lack of influence they were able to exert in their school (which may well be more of an issue for kindergarten teachers given they are isolated), were sources of dissatisfaction.

The work of Richgels (2003) provides an insight into the satisfying aspects of teaching in kindergarten. Richgels conducted observations of a kindergarten teacher over the period of one school year. The teacher, Mrs Poremba, commented; 'What is it that inspires, excites and refreshes me? In a word – children... It is a privilege to support and nurture children as their minds, hands and hearts converge simultaneously' (p. 302). In addition, it was also evident that Mrs Poremba found the development that children make during the school year a satisfying aspect of her work.

In the review of literature associated with those aspects of their work that teachers find satisfying, it appears that teachers of young children have different reasons for enjoying their work. For example, respondents in Nias' study (1989) identified physical contact (p. 87) and the pleasure and quality of the relationship (p. 92) as key sources of satisfaction. Nias also makes a point of introducing a participant comment with "An infant teacher told me..." to separate the comments from the sample which consisted mainly of primary school teachers. This suggests that teachers of young children, such as those in kindergartens, may well find different aspects of their work satisfying.

It has been established that individuals enter the teaching profession for a range of reasons including: contact with children; earning a living; continuing an interest in a particular subject area; providing a service to the community and influencing the lives of others; accommodating other commitments such as having a family; and providing an opportunity for the teachers to be themselves (Cockburn, 2000; Huberman, 1993; Nias, 1989; Lortie, 1975). Those aspects teachers enjoy in relation to their work can also be linked to the reasons they entered the teaching profession (Nias, 1989; Lortie, 1975; The Primary Schools Research and Development Group, 1986). Cockburn (2000) found that teacher's reasons for enjoying teaching tended to vary according to the original reason that they had entered the profession with those who had consistently wanted to teach gaining somewhat more enjoyment from their work.

However, the reason that individuals enter the area of kindergarten teaching, which is a specialised type of teaching, is not known with any certainty. Much of the research literature has ignored the kindergarten teacher. The work of Nias (1989) suggests that teachers working in early childhood education provide different reasons to identify those aspects of their work that they find satisfying or otherwise. This study aims to provide an indication of the reasons that kindergarten teachers entered the teaching profession and more specifically how they came to be teaching in kindergarten. In addition, the study is also interested in outlining those aspects of kindergarten teachers' work that teachers find rewarding or challenging to promote a better understanding of working in this area.

2.8 The Kindergarten Teacher

Catron and Allen (1999) suggest that 'with a clear understanding of the attitudes, attributes and abilities of effective teachers, the different facets of their complex and interrelated roles can be explored' (p. 60). The reality of being a kindergarten teacher and teaching in a kindergarten setting is often different to that portrayed by the electronic and print media, literature and research. Ryan and Ochsner (1999) argue that these sources 'communicate particular representations of what it means to teach young children' (p. 14) and more often than not, these are unrealistic and demeaning to those who work with young children. Swetnam (1992) acknowledges that 'problems arise from the misrepresentation of who teaches, where they teach, how they teach, and what demands are placed on teachers, thereby creating an alarming distortion' (p. 30) of what the work of teachers is like. In the movie *Kindergarten Cop* (Grazer & Reitman, 1990), an undercover police officer, John Kimble, takes control of the kindergarten class. The portrayal of kindergarten teachers in this sense puts forward the notion that kindergarten teaching is easy and that anyone can do it (Swetnam, 1992). Further, John Kimble teaches the children in a manner that would be deemed inappropriate by most experienced kindergarten teachers.

In addition to those roles of the teacher that are portrayed in sources such as movies, are those that are not. Swetnam (1992) argues that 'the things that are not portrayed may be just as harmful to those that are. Class sizes are miniscule. Very little actual classroom instruction is depicted, and paper grading, planning, meetings, and the

extra duties ... are rarely included, reinforcing the perception that teaching is an easy life' (p. 31).

Added to representation of teachers in movies and literature, the historical representation of teachers has done little to enhance their image. In their book *The Kindergarten Teacher*, Heffernan and Todd (1960) provide a detailed account of how a kindergarten teacher should be perceived, a guide to conduct. While it would seem discriminatory by today's standards to outline a required appearance for a position, this was not the case more than forty years ago. Heffernan and Todd (1960) suggest that while the kindergarten teacher may not be beautiful by Hollywood standards, she can be 'one of the most beautiful women in the world in the eyes of adoring kindergarten children' (p.5). The kindergarten teacher's voice was also of considerable interest, with it being suggested that the kindergarten teacher's voice be 'clear and distinct, low pitched and just loud enough to be heard by the children without undue strain and tension' (p.5).

The personality of the kindergarten teacher was not left untouched as they required a certain patience so that they may not be put off by 'wriggling, shuffling of feet, and scratching' (Heffernan & Todd, 1960, p. 5). If for some reason the teacher was not able to look past these things or if subject matter was more of a priority 'to her than people, she should choose some other occupation' (Heffernan & Todd, 1960, p. 5).

The characteristics of kindergarten teachers were addressed by Feeney and Chun (1985). They reviewed a number of research studies examining the personal characteristics of effective early childhood teachers, and concluded that kindergarten teachers are: warm, sensitive, flexible, honest, show integrity, and natural. In addition, these authors found that kindergarten teachers; have a sense of humour; accept individual differences; have the ability to support growth without being over protective; possess physical strength and vitality; are compassionate; demonstrate self-acceptance; have emotional stability and self-confidence; and, possess the ability to sustain effort as well as the ability to learn from experience (Feeney & Chun, 1985).

Catron and Allen (1999) believe that teachers of young children must be authentic, genuine and empathic. In addition, early childhood teachers must also be flexible, open and playful. Gestwicki (1997) discusses the attributes of teachers who work in the area of early childhood education and suggests that teachers needs to have a positive attitude toward self, toward the children they teach, their parents, colleagues, principals and other senior staff. As Catron and Allen (1999) observe 'teachers who have an awareness of their own attitudes, attributes, and abilities; ... make a true difference in the lives of children' (p. 69).

In this section, a brief historical overview of views of the kindergarten teachers has been provided (Heffernan & Todd, 1960; Feeney & Chun, 1985; Gestwicki, 1997; Catron & Allen, 1999). The dearth of literature in this area suggests that some of those views may still be extant in contemporary belief and practice.

2.8.1 Status of the Kindergarten Teacher

The status of the teaching profession, in particular those teachers working in the area of early childhood has received considerable interest in recent years. There have been a number of attempts made to increase the status of early childhood teachers with limited success. However, it is contended that the task is made more difficult without a clear description of what teachers working in early childhood and kindergarten education do on a daily basis.

As early as 1975, Lortie recognised that:

> teaching seems to have more than its share of status anomalies. It is honoured and disdained, praised as "dedicated service" and lampooned as "easy work"... Teaching is a status recorded high respectability of a particular kind; but those occupying it do not receive the level or types of deference reserved for those working in the learned professions, occupying high government office, or demonstrating success in business (p. 10).

More recently, this aspect of teaching has been considered by Spencer (2001) who suggests that 'while society's judgements of teaching have been lower than other professions, expectations for teachers' behaviours have been held to higher, more restrictive standards than other occupations' (pp. 806 – 807).

The need for research in early childhood education was highlighted by Ebbeck (1992) more than ten years ago. She contended that research would help to raise the status of the early childhood profession, breaking away from the historical perspective of early childhood teachers being accorded lower status within the teaching profession, a view also shared by Stonehouse (1991). The view that early childhood education in Australia has a low status is reiterated by Petrie (1992) who writes that the 'early childhood field in Australia constantly battles for credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the wider society' (p. 13). With an increased understanding of the nature of kindergarten teachers' work it may be possible to demonstrate that what occurs in kindergarten is every bit as important as work that is undertaken at both primary and secondary levels of education.

Stonehouse (1991) has suggested that the wider community often questions why those who work within the area of early childhood teaching require formal tertiary qualifications because there is an assumption that working with young children is an extension of 'mothering, with the attitude that just about anybody with patience can do it' (p. 10). The Australian Early Childhood Association (1990) developed a Code of Ethics that was designed to provide guidance for those who work in the field and also so that individuals could be informed about the nature of working in the area of early childhood education thus raising the status of the profession (Stonehouse, 1991). The diversity that exists within early childhood education in Australia, due to variation of what constitutes kindergarten in each state and territory, 'makes it difficult to identify a single knowledge base for the field' (Ott et al, 1990, p. 127). This may be partly responsible for the low status accorded to kindergarten teaching. The early childhood field must ensure that it meets the requirements and standards set for other disciplines, such as an established knowledge base, if it wishes to be considered seriously as a profession (Petrie, 1992).

A number of authors have recognised the lack of a knowledge base, suggesting that this has led early childhood teaching to be viewed as something other than a profession (Petrie, 1992; Ott et al, 1990). This may be further compounded when the view of teaching as art instead of science (Lieberman & Miller, 1992) is considered. If teaching is an art, that is learned through practice, and which relies less on the ability to apply scientific knowledge or theory, it is likely that teaching may continue

to be seen as not having a knowledge base, although such a perception could be the product of popular misconceptions associated with what constitutes "art". It is in this area of early childhood education that a number of researchers have made a call for the knowledge base to be established. For example, Silin (1980, cited in Rodd, 1998, p. 160) argues that in order for the continued professionalisation of early childhood education, a revitalisation of the knowledge base must be undertaken.

There is little agreement as to what constitutes good teaching (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992), although one might ask the obvious question of how could this be? Fleer (2000) interviewed a number of academics, practioners and other key stake holders in the early childhood area in many states and territories in Australia to determine those areas in which they perceived research needed to be conducted. One of the commonly mentioned areas was that of the status of the early childhood profession. Fleer noted that many professionals working in the area of early childhood 'felt that early childhood education was viewed as an area of little value by qualified teachers outside of early childhood education' (p. 66). In addition, other stakeholders, due to the apparent inability of early childhood teachers to communicate their understanding of pedagogy and practice in early childhood, 'were unable to understand or value the student outcomes that were being achieved' (Fleer, 2000, p. 68).

The low status of early childhood teaching has created a number of problems. One, which has serious consequences for the future of the profession, is that teaching in early childhood settings has become an unattractive career option (Fleer, 2000). Furthermore, the low status of early childhood education has other implications for those working in the area of early childhood. For example:

> the low status of the profession was said to contribute to the belief that those with early childhood qualifications were unable to make decisions involving the primary or secondary sectors, but those with qualifications for teaching older students could make decisions on behalf of early childhood education (Fleer, 2000, p. 67).

This issue is discussed further in the section relating to kindergarten and early childhood teachers' interactions with principals and senior members of staff in section 2.11.2.

The low status of the early childhood profession and the lack of a knowledge base in the field of early childhood education are not the only reasons for systematic research in the field. Through this study, it will be possible to provide descriptions of the work practices of four kindergarten teachers through which a deeper understanding of teachers' work in this area may be gained. In the following section (2.9), the roles that kindergarten teachers adopt as they carry out their work are examined.

2.9 Kindergarten Teachers' Roles

Teachers, during the course of a school day, are required to adopt a number of different roles. This has been recognised by Turney et al (1986) who have suggested that teachers undertake their work in three broad domains; classroom, school, and community and that these domains shape the types of roles that teachers are likely to adopt.

In the classroom domain, teachers are required to plan for learning, initiate and guide learning, facilitate independent learning, foster inter-personal relationships, manage the learning environment and monitor and evaluate student performance as well as pursue self-development (Turney et al, 1986).

When working within the school domain, Turney et al (1986) suggest teachers adopt roles in which they work beyond their own class and classroom, including: identifying and mobilizing resources, co-operating in curriculum development, organising and pursuing co-curricular activities, knowing, administering and improving school policy and procedures, and participating in school-focused development programs.

The final domain identified by Turney et al. (1986) is the community domain in which teachers may be required to adopt roles in the following areas: promoting information exchange; opening the school and class to parents and the community; sharing resources with the community; and involving parents and community in school and class policy and practices.

The roles that teachers are required to adopt in each of the three domains put forward by Turney et al (1986) are global in terms of their orientation, that is, they are roles that are likely to be adopted by most, if not all teachers. In writing specifically of the early childhood teacher, Spodek (1987) suggested that early childhood teachers are required to adopt the roles of 'a lecturer, story teller, group discussion leader, traffic director, mediator of conflicts, psychological diagnostician, custodian, assigner of academic work, and file clerk' (p. 1). The demanding and varied nature of teaching young children is recognised by Gestwicki (1997) who states:

> to teachers fall the jobs of collecting money for special events, sending announcements and messages home, and receiving and responding to communications from families. Teachers plan and implement field trips, prepare children for school wide activities, and supervise volunteers and assistants. They write reports to parents, hold conferences, and keep the principal informed of the children's accomplishments and of any challenges they encounter with parents or other community members (p. 407).

Catron and Allen (1999) identified a number of specific roles that teachers working in the area of early childhood education are required to adopt. These include: 'interacting, nurturing, managing stress, facilitating, planning, enriching, problem solving, advocating, and learning (p. 61).

Ryan and Cooper (2000) drawing on Jackson's work, *Life in Classrooms*, suggest that during the course of the day, elementary school teachers adopt the role of gatekeeper, dispenser of supplies, granter of special privileges and timekeeper. Branscombe et al (2000) also recognise the expanded role of early childhood teachers and put forward a similar list of roles that include: 'nurse, psychologist, manager, coach, and social worker' (p. 406). To the broad skills that kindergarten or early childhood teachers require, the following specific tasks can be added, 'repairing toys, detecting guilt or sources of strange odours, restoring physical order from chaos, washing paint from favourite t-shirts, unstopping toilets, or determining fair solutions to playground conflicts' (Gestwicki, 1997, p. 87).

It is evident from the descriptions of the roles adopted by early childhood teachers that these teachers undertake their work in all three domains (classroom, school, and community) identified by Turney et al (1986). It is also apparent that early childhood

teachers adopt each of the roles put forward by Turney et al (1986) and then some more, and often with two groups of children.

The role of the kindergarten teacher has expanded as society has changed, increasing the demands placed upon kindergarten teachers, as well as broadening the roles that they must fulfil (Surbeck, 1998). Catron and Allen (1999) maintain that there is an increase in the expectations of society in terms of what children in early childhood programs should achieve:

> teachers are expected to prepare children for academic success in schools, socialise them into a culturally diverse society, overcome environmental disadvantages, and develop children's emotional capacity to cope with the stressors of a rapidly changing world. Early childhood educators must balance these societal and parental expectations with their knowledge of what is appropriate and growth promoting for young children (p. 58).

The increased roles that kindergarten teachers have been required to adopt may also point to one of the similarities between their work and the work of teachers in other grade levels. It is highly likely that Hargreaves' (1994) "intensification thesis" is applicable to the work of kindergarten teachers. However, I suggest that intensification of kindergarten teachers' work may not be the result of educational change as such, but rather a characteristic of their work. For example, kindergarten teachers have traditionally worked in environments that have demanded high standards, and they have routinely adopted a broad range of roles some of which have required that teachers adopt a social worker role or take on the responsibility of administrative tasks.

A further example of the intensification of kindergarten teachers' work can be found in research undertaken by Mahmood (2000). Mahmood conducted a study with a group of first year out early childhood teachers. All of the participants were female although no information is provided regarding the exact number of participants in the study. The findings of Mahmood's (2000) study indicate that the teachers had concerns in the areas of working with parents, working with other staff, managing children, cultural difficulties, and management of the workplace, employment contacts and registration.

The formalisation of the kindergarten program could be partly attributed to the perceived returns on educational funding for kindergartens. Dombkowski (2001) argues that 'parents and taxpayers want to see results from educational expenditures, and while they may not mind seeing children paint and play as they might in a non-academic kindergarten, they would rather see a rise in test scores' (p. 545). Such expanded expectations require teachers to adopt very different roles and undertake their work in different ways. It is highly likely that a similar shift has occurred in Tasmanian kindergarten programs. However, this is difficult to confirm owing to a lack of reported research.

There are, however, other ways to view the role of the kindergarten teacher. For example, Woodrow (1999) examined three conceptions of childhood and children that are common in society, childhood as a time of innocence, children as a threat and finally children as embryonic adults. Woodrow (1999) argues that teachers' perceptions of childhood, developed through first hand experience or through interaction with artefacts can affect their understanding and shape their roles as early childhood professionals in many ways. The "ways" that Woodrow refers to can include things such as interaction with children, choices made in regard to curriculum and pedagogy, and political discourses.

Woodrow (1999) argues that the child as innocent is one of the most pervasive images of children and childhood in the western world. This image of the child is also recognised by Fleet (2002) who uses the term 'natural' to describe the child. In this view the child is seen as an object and:

> appears as a piece of nature on greeting cards and calendars, and decorates nursery walls. This child, perhaps sleeping on a pumpkin or sitting in cherubic fashion in a flowerpot is portrayed as passive, objectified, and decorative, rather than...active, as cognitive and creative being with agency (p. 19).

Ultimately, adopting the image of childhood as being a time of innocence 'usually works to reassert the power and control of the adult and frequently limits the spaces for children to acknowledge and work constructively with issues such as difference and conflict' (Woodrow, 1999, p. 9). The teachers' role in this view of children and childhood tends to be associated with adopting and maintaining positions of power. It

also requires that teachers 'be all knowing, to consider and make the right decisions on behalf of children and their needs' (Woodrow, 1999, p. 9).

When the child or childhood is viewed as a threat or a monster:

> the teachers' role is usually constructed as very powerful, as they confer rewards, sanction behaviour, and ensure conformity to the acceptable social order... Teachers' roles are constructed in maintaining the social order as they protect themselves and other children from the monster children (Woodrow, 1999, pp. 9 – 10).

The child as embryo adult is a common public and professional image. Woodrow (1999) believes that 'this view of childhood is strongly implicated in early childhood education philosophies, practices and policies and has been reinforced through the dominance of the frame of child development' (p. 10). When the view of children as embryonic adults is adopted, 'the teacher's role is largely constructed as passive; with the teacher's role to be the facilitator of the right environment in which development will flourish' (Woodrow, 1999, p. 10).

In a similar vein, Fleet (2002) argues that in early childhood education there have been shifts to reconceptualise the work of teachers. Fleet goes on to argue that the image of the child is of fundamental importance in terms of how teachers conceptualise their work. The images put forward by Fleet as examples include the 'natural or the romanticised child as well as the objectified and scientifically observed child' (p. 18).

The paper developed by Fleet (2002) puts forward a call for those working in the area of early childhood education to 'shift the frame of perspectives on the nature of early childhood work' (p. 18). She argues:

> there are multiple layers of responsibility, a complexity of roles... Many staff operate with a priority on scheduled maintenance rather than focusing on either the child or their families or looking after the wellbeing of themselves and their co-workers (p. 18).

A range of curriculum documents describe the roles of early childhood teachers. For example, in Tasmania, *The Early Years Curriculum Framework* (Department of

Education, Community and Cultural Development, 1998) provides an overview of the role of teachers working in the area of early childhood. In South Australia, *The Foundation Areas of Learning* (Department for Education and Children's Services, 1996) outlines the teacher's role. However, these documents tend to examine the roles of the teacher in terms of what is required for effectiveness or "best practice".

In the remainder of this chapter, a number of specific roles that early childhood and kindergarten teachers adopt are addressed. The discussion of these roles is structured around each of the three domains in which teachers carry out their work identified by Turney et al (1986). The limited quantities of research that focus specifically on the roles of kindergarten teachers have required inferences to drawn from literature associated with early childhood teachers. The roles that kindergarten teachers adopt or are likely to adopt in the course of their work have been distilled from those put forward by Catron and Allen (1999) as well as those outlined by other early childhood authors (for example, Mahmood, 2000; Ryan & Cooper, 2000; Gestwicki, 1997; Spodek, 1987).

2.10 The Classroom Domain

Presented in this section of the chapter is an examination of those roles that early childhood teachers are required to adopt in the classroom domain. More specifically, the roles of interacting with children and their parents, facilitating, planning, providing transition programs, and professional learning, are discussed along with the implications that these may have for the work of kindergarten teachers.

2.10.1 Interacting with Children

Teachers working in kindergarten settings are required to interact with children in both verbal and non-verbal ways (Catron & Allen, 1999). Fleet (2002) argues that it is important for early childhood teachers to engage in and foster "authentic interactions" and she suggests that what happens between children is as important as what happens between adults (whether parents, staff or support people) and what takes place between adults and children.

The role of teachers in terms of their interaction with children is not something that is particular to those teachers working in kindergarten. Lieberman and Miller (1992) suggest that 'given the power of classroom territoriality, it comes as no surprise that the most important and immediate interactions that teachers have are with their students' (p. 9). However, because of the age of the children, the nature of the interaction is likely to vary, especially given that children are still developing communication skills. Catron and Allen (1999) believe that it is important for teachers working in the area of early childhood education to interact frequently with the children in their care. This can be achieved by teachers who 'initiate a variety of verbal interactions, such as volunteering information to children, asking them open-ended questions, giving instructions, and simply conversing with them' (p. 60).

Teachers working in the area of kindergarten interact with children before they are formally attending schools. This can take the form of incidental conversations and interactions as younger brothers and sisters accompany a parent, or else as more formal interventions such as those of transition programs offered the year before children start kindergarten.

The importance of the interaction that takes place between kindergarten teachers and the children they work with has been recognised by Seefeldt and Wasik (2002). They have suggested that kindergarten teachers should endeavour to interact with children in a supportive and positive manner that is sensitive to the individual needs of each child. Kindergarten teachers, as part of their role of interacting with children, also have the added role of nurturing and caring for the children they teach. Swick and Brown (1999) argue that 'the "caring ethic" is central to the teaching and learning process' (p. 116). Nias (1989) also found that many of the primary school teachers that took part in her study placed a high degree of emphasis on the caring aspect associated with their role as a teacher. Therefore, it can be seen that this is not necessarily an area that is unique to the work of the kindergarten teachers. However, the age of the children being taught determines to a certain extent the level of nurturing that is undertaken on the part of the teacher. If this were to hold true, then nurturing would be a greater part of a teachers' work in kindergarten than a teacher working in a secondary school environment.

Catron and Allen (1999) have also recognised the importance of care and nurturing in early childhood education and suggest that:

> early childhood educators are encouraged to nurture children with touch and physical affection. Nurturing interactions such as hugging, rocking, cuddling, and holding are necessary for children's physical and psychological development (p. 61).

It should be noted that the notion of nurturing children with touch and physical affection may not be appropriate in today's society.

The role of nurturing is also evident in the Kindergarten Teachers Association's (1986) description of the environment kindergarten teachers should endeavour to provide. It is suggested that kindergarten teachers should ensure that each child feels loved, cared for and secure, in an unconditional way. Hargreaves (1994) in a similar manner, puts forward the notion that care within the context of an early childhood classroom is primarily concerned with the interpersonal experience of human nurturance, connectedness, warmth and love.

The role of nurturing children has also been likened to a family context. Teachers in Nias' (1989) study related their work in the classroom to that of a family, with some teachers talking about parenting roles being adopted, and treating their students like their own children. Indeed, Swick and Brown (1999) point to the role that early childhood teachers play in nurturing and caring for children. They state that 'the importance of educating early childhood teachers in ways that enable them to generate and renew beliefs, values and attitudes that are consonant with having the "caring relationship" among themselves and the children and families they care for and nurture' (p. 116) is essential. This suggests that teachers working in early childhood education are not only responsible for the care and education of children whom they teach, but for that of their families as well.

The nurturing role of the teacher can be fulfilled in a range of ways. For example, it may take the form of providing children with verbal support as well as treating children in a respectful and attentive manner when interacting with them (Catron & Allen, 1999). As part of the nurturing role, kindergarten teachers take time to get to

know each child as an individual. This is an important part of the kindergarten teacher's role because, the kindergarten teacher will stimulate children's curiosity and interest by providing materials and experiences to cater for individual needs (Kindergarten Teachers Association, 1986).

The role of interacting with children is not only for children's benefit. Lieberman and Miller (1992) states that the importance of these interactions for teachers should not be overlooked:

> When the rewards from these interactions are plentiful, teachers are energised and thrive. When rewards from these interactions are diminished, teachers lose that part of themselves that is most self-sustaining and most central to the well being of the profession (p. 11).

2.10.2 Interacting with Parents

The research literature and anecdotal accounts provide 'compelling evidence that working with parents in the early years is not only desirable but a necessity' (Willey, 2000, p. 99). The Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) (2000) recognises the importance of the role of parents in early childhood education and state that 'parent participation in the settings which care and educate their children is a strong principle for ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) in Australia and a variety of policies at both government and service level encourage parental involvement' (p. 48). Further, the DETYA (2000) state that 'one to one communication between parents and ECEC personnel is always encouraged so that information about the children can be regularly shared' (p. 49). This view is supported by Seefeldt and Wasik (2002) who suggested that the level of interaction between kindergarten teachers and parents is dependent on the effectiveness of communication between each party.

The importance of parental involvement in education is also acknowledged by Hughes and MacNaughton (1999) who found that parental involvement featured heavily in 162 items they reviewed in an attempt to reconceptualise parent and teacher relationships in the early childhood setting.

The high level of parent – teacher interaction in early childhood education can be partly attributed to the age of the children. Parents are often entering the classroom throughout the day, or at least once in the morning and then again at the end of the session. This has implications for the types of relationships that teachers are able to develop with parents as they arrive to drop off and pick their children up at the end of the session or day. The frequency of interaction between kindergarten teachers and parents has been recognised by Mahmood (2000). She argues that the frequency of teacher-parent contact can add to the difficulty of working with parents in early childhood.

> Early childhood educators have face-to-face interactions with a child's parent each day, for every day the child attends the centre. This means that if a child attends a childcare centre for five days a week, educators would have 400 face-to-face interactions with the parents. On the other hand, primary and secondary teachers on the average would see a student's parents five times a year (Mahmood, 2000, p. 3).

This may indicate that the level of contact with parents is something that is unique to working in an early childhood environment and even more so in kindergarten.

Renwick (1989) conducted a national survey of kindergarten teachers (n = 228) in New Zealand. As part of this process, she asked whether the teachers did or should provide support networks for whole families. Two thirds of the kindergarten teachers felt that they had a responsibility to support parents in matters other than those concerning their children. The responsibility to parents stems from concern for children. If the parent has a problem the kindergarten teacher may be the only person to whom the parent or parents may turn.

Renwick (1989) also addressed the types of problems that kindergarten teachers have been called on to deal with by parents. These included: marital problems, parent and child health, children's behaviour, employment and finances, relationships with family and siblings, education and schooling, and kindergarten matters. This aspect of interacting with parents is also recognised by Ebbeck (1991) who suggests that while marital and economic problems of parents are beyond the control of the early childhood teacher, it is often:

> the early childhood professional who is the first point of contact for a parent in crisis. Although it is accepted that the early childhood professional is neither a social worker nor a marriage counsellor he/she may often be in the situation of listening to a distraught parent with a problem (p. 6).

This aspect of kindergarten teachers' work according to Ebbeck (1991), has led to a diversification of the roles associated with working in this area.

The interaction that early childhood teachers share with parents is also a source of satisfaction. The gratitude and support of parents was also a rewarding aspect of teaching "One in four teachers... felt that parents made them feel needed" (Renwick, 1989, p.92). However at times, some teachers can also see interaction with parents as less than positive. Willey (2000) suggests that 'working with parents demands a commitment of time and energy which some maintain would be best spent directly with the children' (p. 92).

The examination of the literature undertaken by Hughes and MacNaughton (1999) revealed three broad images of parental involvement in the education of their children: parents as teachers; parents as program collaborators; and, parents as decision makers, with the most prevalent of these views being the parent as teacher. While the interactions that teachers and parents share are perceived as important they are not always easy and can at times be problematic (Hughes & MacNaughton, 1999). This has important implications for the level and type of interaction that parents and teachers engage in.

Interacting with parents in early childhood education is also made problematic by the diverse nature of the field. This is acknowledged by Willey (2000) who states that 'there is no single model for working with parents that would meet the needs of every setting' (p. 94). This requires that teachers develop their own strategies for working and interacting with parents, and identifying what interaction is required.

In terms of identifying the type of interaction that is required with kindergarten parents, insights gained from being a parent can be an important source of information for kindergarten teachers. Many teachers working in the field also have children of their own and the experience of being a parent can have implications for interaction with other parents as well as how teachers in the field undertake their

work (Isbell, 1990). Further, Willey (2000) while discussing her own experience of working with parents acknowledges the influence and contribution that being a parent has had on her work 'My own experience as a parent gave me a different insight into children's learning' (p. 93). In addition to a greater insight into children's learning, it is likely that such an experience would help teachers develop strategies to work with parents based on their own experiences of interacting with teachers as a parent.

In the context of early childhood education, 'educators have long acknowledged the significant influence of the family on the care and education of the child' (Powell, 1989, p. 4). While at times this influence can be problematic, there are also a number of positive aspects. Interaction with parents can provide teachers with information related to the children they teach, so that suitable planning can occur (Kindergarten Teachers Association, 1986). Robinson and Jones-Diaz (1999) also argue that early childhood teachers have the opportunity to 'actively make a positive difference in children's lives, and that of their families' (p. 33) through a commitment to interaction with parents, an outcome that is also recognised by the DEETYA (2000). Finally, parental involvement can also help to ensure that there is continuity between the experiences provided to children in early childhood and kindergarten settings through parents and teachers discussing strategies and techniques that can be applied at home to help support the experience children are provided with at school (Kindergarten Teachers Association, 1986).

The range of strategies through which kindergarten teachers can enhance interaction with parents has also been recognised by Seefeldt and Wasik (2002) who argue that 'understanding that parents must be involved in their children's education, kindergarten teachers find a plethora of ways to effectively involve today's busy parents in their children's education' (p. 77). For example, the kindergarten teacher in the Richgels' (2003) study not only valued the interaction that she had with parents but also utilised a parent help program as well as a weekly newsletter to enhance the level of interaction she had with parents.

2.10.3 Interacting with the Teacher Assistant

Despite a wealth of anecdotal evidence related to the relationship and interaction between kindergarten teachers and their assistant, there is relatively little written about this aspect of working in kindergarten. Cole, Holman, Udovicic and White (1990) suggest that kindergarten teacher assistants 'work as para-professionals alongside the teacher, contributing to the planning of the program, the setting up of the total environment and actively participating with children, parents and other adults' (p. 11). The Department of Education (2002) in Tasmania allude to the role of the kindergarten teacher assistant although they do not specifically provide information about kindergarten teacher assistants other than that the amount of time they work in kindergarten is calculated using a formula. If kindergarten teachers and their assistants work as partners in the provision of kindergarten education, it would be advantageous to have an understanding of how kindergarten teachers perceive the experience of working with their assistant. This aspect of kindergarten teachers' work is addressed through this study.

2.10.4 Facilitating

The term teacher 'tends to imply telling or giving information. But the correct way to teach young children is not to lecture or verbally instruct them' (Bredekamp, 1987, p. 52). Instead, Catron and Allen (1999) suggest that teachers 'facilitate the development of creativity primarily through an open, non-judgemental, accepting attitude and a relaxed, flexible learning environment that is rich in resources and abundant with activities' (p. 62). Gestwicki (1997) argues that the full meaning of teacher as facilitator of children's active learning, also encompasses a resource person to help children as they construct their own continually shifting knowledge of the world. Teachers of young children facilitate their development and learning by providing them with time, space, materials and support for active exploration. They carefully choose opportunities based on their knowledge of individual children, child development, and family and society goals and needs. (p. 97).

In the role of facilitator, teachers 'prepare the environment so that it provides stimulating, challenging materials and activities for children. Then teachers closely observe to see what children understand and pose additional challenges to push their

thinking further' (Bredekamp, 1987, p. 52). However, the role of the facilitator in the early childhood classroom is not one that is without criticism. Ryan and Ochsner (1999) argue that 'good early childhood teachers are often apolitical carers of the young who need to reposition themselves from this image of facilitators to that of interventionists' (p. 4). Ryan and Ochsner (1999) suggest that through the adoption of an interventionist role, teachers will then be able to 'take a proactive and explicit political stance with children against social inequalities' (p. 4). Without an understanding of how teachers enact their role as facilitators it is difficult to understand why such a move is necessary. For example, Carl Rogers (1969) in his work *Freedom to learn* uses the term facilitator rather than teacher. According to Rogers (1969) an effective facilitator is one who: demonstrates a realness or genuineness; who values learners by respecting their feelings or opinions; and, one who has empathic understanding and is able to, without being judgemental or evaluative, understand the learner.

The notion that kindergarten teachers adopt the role of facilitator has also been acknowledged through the work of Richgels (2003). Mrs Poremba, the kindergarten teachers in Richgels study, suggested that 'teachers must be patient as they gently nudge! They must always be on the lookout for those awesome moments when yet another student reaches for the baton' (p. 146).

From another perspective, Gestwicki (1997) uses the metaphor of theatrics to examine the concept of teachers being facilitators, with teachers in this instance writing the play, gathering the props, setting the stages and once the play has begun, assuming the role of stage manager, ensuring that the play goes on without interfering too much (p. 98).

2.10.5 Planning

In this section, the roles that kindergarten teachers undertake in terms of planning for the kindergarten program, the physical environment, and, for play are examined. In addition, a number of issues associated with kindergarten attendance options, the Kindergarten Development Check (Department of Education, 2003) and pre-kindergarten programs are also addressed.

Research in the area of teacher planning is important as it allows some insight into the cognitive aspects of teachers' work. 'Any format selected for recording curriculum decisions makes teachers' thinking visible' (Fleet & Patterson, 1998, p. 31). Furthermore, the importance of teacher planning has been recognised by Bromme (1982) who found that through the planning process teachers are able to establish routines that in turn may then be used to organise what occurs during classroom interaction. The nature of planning in kindergarten has been highlighted by Seefeldt and Wasik (2002) who suggest that kindergarten teachers generally undertake an integrated approach to planning and that this allows for the provision of a meaningful curriculum for the children. Effective planning provides teachers with direction, security and confidence as they undertake their work in the classroom (Clark & Peterson, 1986). More recently, and with particular reference to young children, Catron and Allen (1999) believe that with an understanding of child development, teachers of young children are able to plan programs and organise the learning environment so that each child's needs are met.

Clark and Peterson (1986) have suggested that just as teachers' work is constrained by the environment in which they work, the curriculum, the community or the principal, so too may their thinking be constrained by similar factors. The influence that context has on teachers' work has also been acknowledged by Beijaard et al (2000). They argue that teachers' teaching contexts have a strong influence on their knowledge base. Consequently, teachers' planning is shaped by contextual factors.

Fleet and Patterson (1998) present a number of considerations that should be made in relation to the planning that is undertaken by teachers working in early childhood education. First, 'Planning must relate specifically to "live children", that is, decisions must be made with reference to the children in each group. Generally, it is not appropriate to plan the same activities for children who happen to attend a service on different days of the week' (p. 34). This increases the level of planning that is undertaken by kindergarten teachers who may have two groups per day, four days per week.

Second, 'learning experiences planned for children must be meaningful, relevant to children's lives, and not limited by perceptions of the skills requirements for the next

stage of the child's education' (Fleet & Patterson, 1998, p. 34). The notion that the pressure of academic performance is being applied to early childhood and kindergarten programs is a very real concern shared by teachers working in these environments.

Third, opportunities must be sought to include families in curriculum decision making as 'such continued involvement recognises the importance of parents and teachers developing a shared understanding of each child' (Fleet & Patterson, 1998, p. 34). This points to one of the main differences that exist between kindergarten teachers and teachers working at other grade levels. For example, Ryan and Cooper (2000) suggest that 'secondary teachers...focus almost entirely on the content and preparation of an interesting presentation' (p. 207).

Finally, Fleet and Patterson (1998) suggest that it is important to leave a place for children's voices to be heard in the planning process and an avenue for them to contribute to the decision making process regarding their learning. 'Children have the right to influence programming directions' (p. 34). This view has also been recognised by Seefeldt and Wasik (2002) who have argued that kindergarten children should be consulted about the kindergarten program.

2.10.5.1 The Kindergarten Program

It has been argued that the nature of kindergarten programs varies considerably. Kostelnik et al (1993) believed that programs for young children encompass variety of educational philosophies and curricula. This view is also shared by Karweit (1992) who suggested that while the concept of kindergarten has been applied in a variety of contexts, 'the kindergarten experience itself is far from uniform' (p. 82). However, research conducted by Skinner, Bryant, Coffman and Campbell (1998) found that the five kindergartens they studied shared 'common characteristics in terms of activities, routines, rules and structures of time and space' (p. 300). The similarities between each of these findings could be explained by the teachers in Skinner et al (1998) study all being from relatively the same geographic location.

Kindergarten teachers should endeavour to provide a program in which the individual differences of children, in terms of their ability and rate of development,

are recognised (Moyer, 2001). In addition, Moyer suggests that teachers offer a program that places an emphasis on educating the whole child, that is, physically, socially, emotionally, and intellectually. The views of Catron and Allen (1999) are similar to those of Moyer in that they also emphasise development. They state that the kindergarten teacher should provide a program that is 'based on an understanding of growth and development, combined with a respect for each individual child and family' (p. 74).

This aspect, of catering for the individual needs of children is also recognised by Seefeldt and Wasik (2002) who believe that kindergarten teachers should cater for the individual needs of each child. This is achieved through the development of a program that provides children with physical, social, emotional, and cognitive based learning experiences.

The Kindergarten Teachers Association (1986) suggests that kindergarten teachers in Tasmania should endeavour to provide learning programs that are comprised of three broad categories of experiences: outdoor, indoor and whole group. The importance of a program that utilises both the indoor and outdoor environments is recognised by Carlson, Catron and Beckmann (1999) who suggest that 'all children's classrooms should provide direct access to a protected outdoor play area. This direct linkage of the indoor and outdoor play area allows greater in-and-out movement of children throughout the day and maximises use of outdoor space as an extension of the learning environment' (p. 118).

The nature of kindergarten programs can be viewed on a continuum with one end being associated with formal programs and on the other, informal programs (Catron & Allen, 1999). At the formal end of the continuum, the content and development of knowledge and skills is perceived as important. In addition, the children are provided with direct instruction and are seen to be motivated by external factors. On the other hand, in an informal program, the children are provided with opportunities to explore the environment, with the emphasis being placed on the process. There is a belief that children are internally motivated and that this motivation will prompt them to select those experiences in which they need to participate. In addition, the development of independence and self-esteem is considered an important outcome of

the informal program whereas in formal programs, meeting standards of achievement are valued (Catron & Allen, 1999).

The level of formality associated with the program also has an impact upon the role of the kindergarten teacher who implements the program. Catron and Allen (1999) suggest that within a formal kindergarten program, teachers provide the same experiences, mostly in large groups, for all children through direct teaching. In contrast, rather than engaging in direct teaching, the teacher in the informal program acts as a facilitator. The kindergarten teacher will also provide the children with a range of experiences from which they are able to choose, ensuring the individual needs of children are being met and that they are able to develop at their own pace.

Alternatively, some kindergarten teachers offer a continuous program which the Kindergarten Teachers Association (1986) define as 'a type of program where the day is organised so that the children have continual access to both the indoor and outdoor learning experiences' (p. 24). These teachers schedule whole group events so that interruptions do not impede the flow of the day (Kindergarten Teachers Association, 1986). In addition, teachers providing more informal programs strive to recreate an environment that is closely aligned with the child's home environment in which the 'child's play moves between the indoors and outdoors depending on their (sic) needs and interests' (Cole et al, 1990, p. 2).

The use of a continuous program or a variation of this program is designed to allow kindergarten teachers to cater for the needs of individual children. Kindergarten teachers, having acknowledged the natural curiosity of children, are then in a position to provide children with opportunities to pursue their own interests and develop initiative and self reliance, as well as being able to exercise decision making within a safe environment, (Kindergarten Teachers Association, 1986). In addition, Cole et al (1990) suggest teachers working in a continuous program are able to provide a broader range of activities and experiences opening up access options for children with special needs.

The adoption of a continuous program also has certain implications for the kindergarten teacher in terms of his/her role. However, the majority of these implications stem from the apparent lack of structure with the program, requiring teachers to undertake planning that is 'very detailed...[to] cater for the needs of the individual rather than the whole group' (Kindergarten Teachers Association, 1986, p. 26). The role of the teacher in this regard is recognised by Cole et al (1990) who suggest that the teacher must identify each child's stage of development in all areas.

During the late 1980's, Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) was also an influence on kindergarten programs. Initially outlined by Bredekamp (1987) DAP kindergarten programs aimed to match the developmental level of the children, and to be active, utilising play and providing children with active, meaningful experiences. Over fifteen years on, Moyer (2001) recognises the continuing importance of DAP for kindergarten children.

There has been a push toward the provision of more formal kindergarten programs in recent years. Moyer (2001) argues that 'the pressure of academic achievement, coupled with the mistaken idea that today's children have outgrown the need to play, have led to increased emphasis on basic skills in kindergarten' (p. 163). The formalisation of the kindergarten program is also recognised by Bosich (2000) in her discussion of moving from lecturing at a university to teaching in an early childhood classroom. The formalisation of the program was made apparent through comments made by her university students. 'My trainees were not seeing indoor/outdoor programs... they said, due to issues of duty of care. They were seeing learning centres marginalised, worksheets parading as serious education, and a lack of open-ended experiences revolving around concrete materials' (p. 41).

2.10.5.2 Attendance Options

In Tasmania, kindergarten teachers are employed to teach on either a sessional or full day basis, with children attending kindergarten for either two full-days or four half-days each week.

Originally, kindergarten teachers taught classes on a half-day basis which was seen to have the distinct purpose of ensuring that kindergarten was not seen as child

minding (Brennan & O'Donnell, 1986). The standard kindergarten schedule of morning classroom programs served a number of additional advantages including the kindergarten teacher being 'free to visit in the afternoons, basically functioning as a social welfare worker' (Gestwicki, 1997, p. 216). The task of home visitation by kindergarten teachers aimed to educate parents (Cuthill et al, 1998).

Over the last decade, kindergarten teachers in Tasmania have increasingly been involved in teaching full-day kindergarten sessions. Indeed, the results of a study by Boardman (2002) showed that slightly more than half (n = 112) of the teachers who participated taught full-day kindergarten whilst the remainder taught half-day kindergarten. In addition, some teachers taught both full-day and half-day kindergarten (n = 13). It is evident that Tasmanian kindergarten teachers are providing a range of attendance options for children, reflecting the varied experiences for kindergarten teachers working in Tasmanian Government schools.

In Tasmania, teachers of full-day kindergarten programs provide sessions on two days of the week, with children attending school for the full school day. Teachers of half-day kindergarten programs provide sessions on four days of the week, usually Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. For these teachers this means that they teach two different groups of children each day, often with a break sufficient only to organise the classroom before the next group arrive.

2.10.5.3 Planning the Kindergarten Program

The nature of the kindergarten and the focus on the individual child makes planning an important component of kindergarten teachers' work. The Kindergarten Teachers Association (1986) describes the process of observation and decision making related to individual programming for kindergarten children, as an important element of kindergarten teachers' work.

Carlson et al (1999) suggest that 'the goal of a well planned environment for young children is that both the children and their teachers can say "I like it here. This is a good place for me to be!" (p. 112). To ensure that this goal is satisfied, Carlson et al (1999) suggest that kindergarten teachers must possess knowledge of 'the architectural features, the type and placement of materials in a classroom, the

schedule of daily activities, and staff assignments' (p. 112). Carlson et al (1999) go on to add that it is essential to:

> plan the daily schedule by blocking out the routine or fixed events, adding large uninterrupted blocks of time for free play and guided play with children making choices from a variety of creative learning activities, and providing for transitions... Whenever children are not involved in a care giving task or a planned activity, they should be involved in free play (p. 126).

They also add that 'planning for whole group times is usually undertaken with a 10 – 15 minute time frame in mind at the beginning of the year although by the end of the year this can be extended to 20 minutes (Carlson et al, 1999, p. 127). The main group time is usually conducted in the morning before the children are tired and then again at the end of the session. The large group time may include activities such as news sharing, songs, finger rhymes, discussions, reading stories or other activities such as counting (Carlson et al, 1999).

2.10.5.4 Planning the Physical Environment

The importance placed on the teacher's role in planning the kindergarten environment is not new. Heffernan and Todd (1960) believe that the 'teacher knows the importance of the environment the kindergarten provides and how equipment and materials contribute to the child's development' (p. 4). More recently, Moyer (2001) has highlighted the importance of the teachers' role in this area, suggesting that 'how teachers arrange kindergarten classrooms affects children's interests, level of interaction and involvement, initiative development, skills development, and overall attitude toward schooling and learning' (p. 164).

The process of planning an effective kindergarten environment, which caters for the needs of individual children, the needs of the group as well as the teacher, is both time consuming and demanding. Branscombe et al (2000) argue that 'teachers spend hours before school starts and after sessions are underway arranging and maintaining the classroom' (p. 407). This has also been recognised by Skinner et al (1998) who found 'teachers spend a great deal of time preparing lessons and setting up centres to allow children's active exploration and social interaction with peers' (p. 301).

The kindergarten teacher, when planning the kindergarten environment must ensure that 'materials are changed frequently in both the indoor and outdoor environments' (Kindergarten Teachers Association, 1986, p. 12). It is also important that materials are changed on a regular basis so that they may be increased in complexity to generate higher levels of involvement and depth of understanding (Moyer, 2001).

In order to plan the kindergarten environment, teachers must consider a number of factors which include, 'the distribution of activities, the amount of space required per activity, the flow of traffic between activities, the convenience, the responsiveness of the environment to children, and wall displays and decorations' (Carlson et al, 1999, p. 117). In addition to organising the room in terms of the physical layout of materials, the aesthetic aspects of the classroom also require attention from the teacher. 'Wall displays and decorations are an important part of the environment. Pictures and other displays for children should be at the child's eye level... and the majority of materials should be the children's creations' (Carlson et al, 1999, p. 118). The kindergarten teacher should also endeavour to arrange the environment from 'the kindergartner's point of view and perspective' (Moyer, 2001, p. 164).

The physical, interactive and affective environments influence young children's learning and for this reason Fleet and Patterson (1998) believe that it is important for kindergarten teachers to include 'the maintenance of an integral relationship with the learning environment' (p. 34) in their planning. Added to this, teachers need to maintain a balance of 'indoor/outdoor, quiet/active, individual/small group/ large group, large muscle/small muscle, and child initiated/staff initiated activities' (Carlson et al, 1999, p. 126).

2.10.5.5 Planning for Play

In this section, the genres, theories or approaches to programming for play are not addressed (for a detailed examination of these issues see Dockett & Fleer, 1998), as the focus is on the importance of play in early childhood and kindergarten settings. In addition, this section is also concerned with some of the considerations that teachers need to make in terms of providing children with opportunities to play.

Drawing on the legacy of Froebel, Pestalozzi and Montessori who shared the view that play was an important aspect in children's development of knowledge, play is still seen by many writers as a vital component of the kindergarten program (Sayeed & Guerin, 2000; Catron & Allen, 1999; Arthur, Beecher, Dockett, Farmer & Death, 1996; Dockett & Lambert, 1996; Dockett, 1995; Smith, 1994). In short, 'a commitment to play has underpinned many traditional approaches to early childhood curriculum' (Dockett & Fleer, 1998, p. 12).

The value of play has been recognised by numerous philosophers and educators since the inception of kindergarten education more than 150 years ago with a view that 'play was fundamental to the success of kindergarten' (Brosterman, 1997, p. 33). The fundamental nature of play in terms of the kindergarten program is also recognised by Catron and Allen (1999) and Dockett and Fleer (1998) who have suggested through play children are able to reach their optimum level of development. Smith (1994) adds that play is 'one useful way in which the child can acquire developmental skills - social, intellectual, creative, physical' (p. 16). In addition, play also provides a means through which children are able to develop emotionally. This is achieved because 'play provides a medium for interaction allowing the child to express and explore his/her emotions' (Brosterman, 1997, p. 32). Kostelnik et al (1993) take the role of play a step further suggesting that 'all areas of development are enhanced through children's play activities' (p. 54).

There are a number of considerations that teachers need to make when planning for play and determining their role in children's play. Dockett (1995) believes that teachers of young children have a greater role than simply planning, providing resources and an appropriate environment. Dockett and Lambert (1996) point out that 'it is a common misconception that teachers have little or no role in children's play' (p. 31). Instead, the role of early childhood and kindergarten teachers is to 'consider the interests of the children, the direction of the play, and ways in which play can be made more complex' (Dockett, 1995, p. 1). In addition, Moyles (1994) has argued that it is important for teachers to 'recognise that, for young children, play is a tool for learning ... practitioners who acknowledge and appreciate this can, through provision, interaction and intervention in children's play, ensure progression, differentiation and relevance in the curriculum' (p. 6).

The varied roles that teachers adopt in children's play are recognised by the Education Department of Tasmania (1988) who suggest that the teacher's role is typically that of an observer. They also believe that teachers should take note of the various understandings that children demonstrate while engaged in play. The adoption by teachers of the role of observer in children's play has also been recognised by Dockett (1995) and Dockett and Fleer (1998) who believe that teachers can observe children while they play, documenting the nature of the play that children engage in. This will enable them to gain insights into the current skills, knowledge and understandings that the children possess, thereby getting to know the children better (Dockett, 1995). During observations, teachers can also consider the level of social skills displayed by the children. There are however a number of other roles that teachers adopt in their role of facilitating play. Dockett and Lambert (1996) suggest that teachers, in addition to observing children at play, also manage play, promote equity in play, mediate play, complicate children's play, and, collect and communicate data about play.

The role that teachers adopt in terms of their involvement with children's play can also be viewed along a continuum (Dockett and Fleer, 1998). At one end of the continuum, the teacher's role is likened to that of a manager. The teacher provides children with a range of resources and sets up the environment in ways that facilitate play.

The middle point of the continuum is described by Dockett and Fleer (1998) as representing the role of facilitator or mediator in children's play. At this point of the continuum, the teacher intervenes to solve problems, observe play episodes or provides assistance to children so that they are able to identify what is occurring in a particular episode of play, engage in an appropriate manner, or re-direct play.

At the other end of the continuum, the teacher actively participates in children's play by adopting a role associated with the play that is taking place. The teacher's role in this instance can range from being a parallel player in which they work alongside the children using similar materials to being a co-player in which they adopt a role in the children's play but do not take control (Dockett & Fleer, 1998).

Each of the levels of involvement outlined by Dockett and Fleer (1998) have different requirements for the planning that teachers undertake in regard to planning for play. For example, in terms of managing children's play, planning issues that teachers may consider could include the arrangement of both the indoor and outdoor learning environments, or the type and quantity of resources that children are provided with. The amount of time that is dedicated to play is also an important consideration, as teachers 'need to plan play periods carefully ensuring that there is time for complex play to emerge' (Dockett & Fleer, 1998, p. 173). The amount of time that is made available for play in the program is also important because as Dockett (1995) argues, the 'amount of time within a program that is allocated [to play] is an indicator to adults and children how important play is' (p. 8).

The notion of children outgrowing play (Moyer, 2001) could be attributed to views held by adults about play. Dockett and Fleer (1998) recognise a number of options that teachers have available to them in terms of organising for play. These include: work then play; play as a pedagogical tool; project approach; event based approach; and, Reggio Emilia approach (p. 241). The formalisation of the kindergarten program has at times, been made without considering the needs of four and five year old children. For example, Sayeed and Guerin (2000) believe that 'for adults play is an optional and conscious activity where leisure time is used to balance the trials and tribulations of everyday modern living' (p. 1). However, in kindergarten, children are 'active, curious learners, who need adequate space, a variety of materials, and large blocks of time in which to try out their ideas' (Moyer, 2001, p. 164) through play.

In order to maximise the value of play within the kindergarten program, teachers must 'appreciate that play is a powerful learning tool and must take advantage of the power of play to motivate the children to explore new materials and situations' (Education Department of Tasmania, 1988, p. 24). In addition, the kindergarten teacher must ensure that children are provided with appropriate experiences that are suited to their individual needs, in particular play experiences that build on from those the children have already had. Kindergarten teachers provide these experiences for children in both the indoor and outdoor learning environments (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2002).

2.10.5.6 The Kindergarten Development Check

A mandated aspect of the kindergarten program in government schools in Tasmanian is the Kindergarten Development Check (Department of Education, 2003). The Kindergarten Development Check must be administered twice during the year; before the end of the 1st Term and again before the end of the 2nd Term.

The kindergarten teachers are required to assess students against six critical core markers; gross motor; fine motor; personal and social behaviour; cognitive development; listening, speaking and understanding; and speech and language. The children are assessed as either "yes" or "no" in relation to each of the critical core markers. Any child that has "no" recorded against any marker after the first assessment period is automatically recoded as being "at risk" (Department of Education, 2003). The implementation of the Kindergarten Development Check (Department of Education, 2003) has a number of implications for the planning that kindergarten teachers undertake. In particular, kindergarten teachers need to schedule regular intervals in the program for the kindergarten check to be completed.

2.10.5.7 Transition Programs

Kindergarten teachers are not only required to plan and teach the formal kindergarten program, they are also required to plan an appropriate transition program for students who will start kindergarten the following year. These programs tend to vary from one kindergarten setting to another given the diverse nature of kindergartens, homes and schools. The varied nature of transition programs has been recognised by Dockett and Perry (2001) who argue that this is necessary so 'programs that are relevant, meaningful, and appropriate' (p. 5) can be developed. Planning and implementing transition programs is made somewhat more difficult for kindergarten teachers because one 'cannot assume that all the participants in children's transition to school are focused on the same things' (Dockett & Perry, 2002, p. 84). However, one thing remains clear, children's transition from home to school marks a significant change in not only their lives but also that of their family (Howard, Dockett & Perry, 1999; Dockett, Perry, Howard & Meckley, 1999). Dockett and Perry (2001) extend this idea suggesting that it is also an important time for educators when young children attend school for the first time.

In this section, issues associated with school readiness are not addressed because as Dockett and Perry (2002) suggest, 'school educators have a range of beliefs and understandings about school readiness and the role of this in the early childhood curriculum' (p. 67). Instead, the purpose of this section is to provide a brief overview of transition programs because they form an important element of the work that kindergarten teachers undertake.

Dockett, Perry, Howard, Whitton and Cussak (2002) argue that pre-school / kindergarten transition programs help to serve two main purposes. First, they help the child feel comfortable with the transition from home to school and secondly, they also provide an opportunity for parents to be introduced to formal schooling. The relationships that parents are able to develop through transition programs are also an important component of their introduction to the school and its culture, particularly if parents have not had other children attend school. Dockett et al (2002) recognise these relationships are vital because they help parents and carers 'develop a sense of belonging and a sense that they are valued members of the school community' (p. 350).

In order to be able to implement effective transition programs, Dockett et al (2002) suggest that teachers must be able to: provide opportunities for children, parents and teachers to develop positive relationships; ensure each child's development as a capable learner is being facilitated; secure dedicated funding and resources; encourage the involvement of a range of stakeholders; plan and effectively evaluate the program; promote flexibility and responsiveness, establishing the program on a foundation of mutual trust and respect; encourage communication that is reciprocal among participants; and, finally meet the needs of the community and the individual needs of children and parents.

In research associated with the implementation of a transition to school program in New South Wales, Howard et al (1999) found that while there were major benefits for children and their families, the benefits also extended to teachers. They found the use of a transition program provided teachers with an opportunity to get to know children and their families, the social and academic capabilities of the children and to

gather valuable information that could be used to inform the kindergarten program that was offered in the following year.

In their paper *Who's Ready for What? Young Children Starting School,* Dockett and Perry (2002) examine issues associated with perceptions of school readiness as well as the range of perspectives that different stakeholders bring to the notion of readiness. Of particular interest was that Dockett and Perry (2002) found that parents and teachers expressed similar views and that they were 'more concerned that children want to go to school and are happy to be at school, than they are about children starting school with an incredible array of skills and knowledge' (p. 82).

In Tasmanian Kindergartens, the provision and structure of pre-kindergarten programs are run at the discretion of the school. The Department of Education (2002) in Tasmania suggest that pre-kindergarten programs may take the form of parent and child sessions in which the children and their parents or guardians attend a session once per week. Alternatively, kindergarten teachers may also offer home based programs in which they meet the children in their homes.

2.10.6 Professional Learning

One of the other important roles that teachers are required to adopt in the classroom domain is the role of professional learning. Kindergarten teachers are responsible for their own ongoing professional learning as well as that of the children they teach. It is important to recognise that in this section, professional learning is not being considered in terms of facilitating educational change. Instead, professional learning is viewed as a role which teachers must adopt because as Robert (2000) suggests, 'professional development activities also have the potential to sustain the profession's vibrancy, energy and level of skill' (p. 277), leading to a more professional perception of early childhood education.

This role of professional learning is recognised by Catron and Allen (1999) who believe that 'the best teachers of young children are committed to continuous learning and developing as effective early childhood professionals' (p. 66). These authors add that because of the diverse nature of teaching in early childhood settings, it is important that teachers working in this area are provided with 'training,

experience and opportunities for ongoing professional development to support their commitment to fulfilling diverse role and responsibilities' (Catron & Allen, 1999, p. 59).

The role of professional learning in terms of teachers' work is also highlighted by Kostelnik et al (1993) who state that in order 'to remain effective, early childhood educators and program administrators must keep abreast of developments in the field throughout their careers' (p. 29). The importance of professional learning for teachers is also recognised by Dean (1991) who argues that 'it is essential that the adults develop in their work if the pupils are to achieve their potential' (p. 36).

While the importance of professional development for those working in the areas of early childhood and kindergarten education has been recognised, in many instances in early childhood and kindergarten settings 'accessing professional development activities relies on individual initiative' (Robert, 2000, p. 279). This may indicate that little is currently known about professional development that is offered to teachers working in these settings. This view is shared by Wood and Bennett (2000), who conducted a study that aimed to gain a greater understanding of what happens in classrooms on a daily basis. They concluded greater research needs to be conducted concerning what constitutes effective forms of professional development as little is currently known about this, particularly in the area of early childhood education.

2.11 The School Domain

Presented in this section are those roles that early childhood and kindergarten teachers are required to adopt in the school domain. The roles include, interacting with colleagues and principals, or senior members of staff.

2.11.1 Interacting with Teachers

In this section, the relationships that teachers have with other teaching staff are examined. This includes the collaborative practices, or lack thereof in which early childhood and kindergarten teachers are able to participate.

Teacher culture, according to Hargreaves (1995), is associated with the relationships that teachers have with one another. Patterns of relationships, according to Hargreaves (1995) vary across three domains; cultural content (shared values and purposes), cultural form (interaction with colleagues and other school personnel) and finally, work structures (the impact that timetabling and decision making processes can have on the way in which teachers work with their colleagues). This is of particular concern when Hargreaves' thoughts on teacher culture are applied to kindergarten teachers as it is highly likely that kindergarten teachers will hold different views about the curriculum and teaching practices compared to those of their colleagues working with older students.

The cultural content, that is the values and purposes that guide action (Hargreaves, 1995), are likely to be inconsistent with that of other teachers. In particular, it could be speculated that the focus on the whole child and the play based curriculum offered in kindergarten are simply incompatible with those values and purposes that guide primary grade teachers and their work.

Pollard (1987) asserts that the notion of staff culture is important because there is a 'degree of cohesion in teachers' views of school life' (p. 104). However, given that most schools have only one kindergarten teacher it is questionable whether the kindergarten teacher's experience of staff culture and school life would reflect a "degree of cohesion".

Further to this, Nias (1989) contends that teachers have traditionally worked in a building in which they have carried out their work in the 'tradition, established in urban elementary schools in the nineteenth century, that instruction is best carried out in "box" classrooms occupied by one teacher and a group of thirty or forty children' (p. 15). While all teachers work in relative isolation from other teachers, spending most of their time with children, nothing could be more so than for kindergarten teachers. The physical design or location of the kindergarten has been recognised by Seefeldt and Wasik (2002) as a potential source of isolation for kindergarten teachers. This physical isolation of the kindergarten classroom also has implications for the level of support that kindergarten teachers are able to receive from teachers

who work in the main school building. Kindergarten teachers do however have the services of an untrained teacher assistant throughout their teaching sessions.

Because they usually work within a different timetable to that of the rest of the school, the work structures of kindergarten teachers restrict the ways in which they are able to work with other teachers. This aspect of teaching in kindergarten settings is highlighted by Bosich (2000) who commented on the lack of interaction with other staff on a day-to-day basis, stating 'I don't have lunches with colleagues debating the comings and goings in education' (p. 42). However, this could also be attributed to the transition from university rather than specifically related to the experience of teaching kindergarten.

The importance of interaction between teachers is outlined by Pollard (1987) who states that 'staff in primary schools need each other – for support, to bolster self esteem, to release tension, to interpret events, to swap ideas and to cope with problems and crises' (p. 105). While this may be the case for those teachers teaching in the primary area of the school, what does this mean for kindergarten teachers who keep different hours? The children arrive at different times in the day and for this reason kindergarten teachers have their breaks at different times, or have no breaks at all. In a similar light, staffroom culture is an important influence on any individual teachers' work (Pollard, 1987, p. 119). This also has implications for kindergarten teachers who are often only in the staffroom for limited periods of time each day, if at all.

It has been suggested that teachers are not often provided with the opportunity to work with other teachers, thus limiting their ability to develop a shared professional knowledge (Hargreaves, 1994; Lortie, 1975). Nias (1989) also enters into this debate suggesting that 'teachers often learn to depend on their own knowledge, interests and preferences in making pedagogic and curriculum decisions. Indeed, this freedom from external constraints and collegial influence is, for some teachers, one of the main attractions of the job' (Nias, 1989, p. 16). For the kindergarten teacher whether or not this is a "main attraction", the "freedom" of isolation is assured through work structures such as timetabling and physical location. However, these factors also

serve to limit the opportunities that kindergarten teachers have to interact with other teachers.

2.11.2 Interacting with Principals and Senior Members of Staff

There is a wealth of literature associated with leadership in educational settings, in particular the characteristics and leadership styles of principals and senior members of staff. For the purposes of this section, the importance of interaction between teachers and their principal is the focus.

The interaction that takes place between teachers and their principal is of vital importance because as Lieberman and Miller (1992) point out, 'there is no doubt that the morale and the teacher's sense of professionalism has a great deal to do with the principal's treatment of the faculty' (Lieberman & Miller, 1992, p. 12). While this quote refers to secondary school teachers, it is highly likely that a similar situation would exist in primary schools in which kindergarten could be considered a faculty.

Limited research has been undertaken concerning educational leadership and early childhood education (Boardman, 2001). Traditionally, educational leadership in early childhood education was the responsibility of the infant mistress, although this is largely unrecognised in any of the formal literature.

In Tasmania, Boardman (1999) conducted a study of 245 early childhood teachers and 30 principals. Boardman (2001) found that teachers appeared to be unhappy with their relationships and/or interactions with their principal. Further, Boardman (2001) suggests that:

> the early childhood paths being traversed by K – 2 teachers and their principal leaders show little congruence, with many obstructions and poor signage along the way. Changes are needed. Teachers need to reach out and invite their principals to visit their classrooms. Principals need to spend time in K – 2 classrooms on a regular basis. Understanding will only come with enhanced communication and interest between both parties (p. 11).

The findings of Boardman's research highlight a lack of interaction between kindergarten teachers and their principals. This is an important consideration because

'the relationship with one's principal is of paramount importance in a teacher's work life' (Lieberman & Miller, 1992, p. 12).

In terms of early childhood education, educational leadership has been defined by Rodd (1994) as:

> influencing the behaviour of others, particularly staff and parents, to contribute to a creative early childhood program, administering the program, supervising staff and guiding parents in ways which will enhance their personal growth and professional development and progress, planning for and implementing change in order to improve organisational and professional effectiveness (p. 5).

Stamopoulos (1998) conducted a study in Western Australia that addressed the perceptions of principals concerning their leadership of early childhood staff. She found that principals were involved in three out of ten educational issues, those being the supervision of pre-primary teachers, professional development and educational advice and leadership. The remaining issues were the responsibility of the pre-primary teachers and included; developing the program, selecting appropriate strategies to ensure learning occurs, assessing and monitoring outcomes, examining the programs for areas of improvement, and facilitating appropriate change. In addition, the pre-primary teachers also had to ensure continuity of learning across kindergarten to grade one with respect to content covered and methods / strategies used, and evaluate the effectiveness of the program in light of the overall school plan.

The reasons that may be attributed to the lack of sound educational leadership in the area of early childhood education were also examined by Stamopoulos (1998). She found that principals felt they lacked the knowledge and experience that would enable them to provide sound leadership in early childhood education. The pre-primary area was also perceived as being a specialised area, particularly in terms of its 'curriculum, teaching style, classroom management and philosophy, which were all different to that of the primary school' (p. 27). This is an important result in terms of this study, not only because it points to the differences that exist in each of the areas outlined above between kindergarten and primary school teachers and the work

they undertake, but also in terms of how principals and potentially other senior staff perceive the work of kindergarten teachers.

The findings of Stamopoulos' (1998) study provide an insight into the diverse and complex roles associated with being a kindergarten teacher. Stamopoulos found that in the area of administration and managerial roles principals had direct responsibility for managing the implementation of departmental policies and guidelines and liaising with other organisational units concerning administrative issues. Kindergarten teachers on the other hand, were required to cover a range of additional tasks which included, 'attending to school administration tasks, compiling administrative information, managing the pre-primary centres finances, managing the pre-primary centres human resources, and organising the purchase and allocation of resources (p. 29).

The interactions that take place between kindergarten teachers and their principals are also vital because as Dean (1991) points out, 'teachers are susceptible as anyone else to praise and encouragement and recognition of the work they do. It is the task of management to see that sufficient recognition and praise is offered' (p. 16). However, this is made difficult when the findings of Stamopoulos' (1998) study are considered. She found that a large number of principals identified that they had a lack of understanding and experience of what occurs in kindergarten classrooms. The differences that exist between kindergarten programs and those offered in primary school classrooms, and the perception that kindergarten teachers were more knowledgeable about their needs were also common reasons that limited the amount of leadership offered by principals in the area of kindergarten education.

2.12 The Community Domain

In this section, the discussion is focused on the teacher's role of interacting with the community.

2.12.1 Interacting with the Community

Interacting with the community in which they work is not something new for kindergarten teachers. Forty years ago, Heffernan and Todd (1960) recognised the

importance of kindergarten teachers interacting with the community, suggesting that kindergarten teachers need to have an understanding of the nature of the community in which they work. This is necessary not only to:

> provide her with the resource places which children may visit to broaden their experiences with their physical and social world, but it contains people who are always willing to share their experiences, show their treasures, or lend a hand at helping at the invitation of the teacher (Heffernan & Todd, 1960, p. 5).

In terms of their involvement with the community, kindergarten teachers are often required to adopt the role of advocate for young children, 'an important and often overlooked role' (Catron & Allen, 1999, p. 65).

Teachers must be advocates for those children who are abused, who have special needs, who do not receive adequate care at home, who are homeless (Catron & Allen, 1999). Working with very young children requires teachers to be in close contact with parents, and in some ways to be particularly vigilant about the well being of children and families (Branscombe et al, 2000, p. 62). In this sense, kindergarten teachers are advocates not only for the child in the classroom, but also the child's family.

In addition to the role of being an advocate for children, kindergarten teachers are also required to adopt the role of advocate for kindergarten and early childhood education. This is recognised by Catron and Allen (1999) who suggest that 'the role of advocate reaches beyond advocacy for meeting the needs of children in their own classroom into the realm of public policy and commitment to excellence in the field of early childhood education' (p. 66). Further, Moyer (2001) believes that kindergarten teachers must ensure that they educate 'central administrators, supervisors, and principals who oversee the kindergarten program' (p. 165). These groups need to be provided with information related to the philosophies associated with kindergarten education and the needs of four and five year old children (Plevyak & Morris, 2002; Moyer, 2001).

In the role of advocate, the kindergarten teacher is likely to be operating in both the classroom, school and community domains. The kindergarten teacher as advocate has been included in the community domain because it is possible that through being an advocate for kindergarten children in the community domain, this will flow down through the other domains. Kindergarten teachers are often required to be advocates for those aspects of kindergarten that other teachers, parents and the wider community do not understand or value, as well as the importance of the kindergarten experiences for young children (Nyland, 2001, Tasmanian Education Department, 1988). This is also recognised by Plevyak and Morris (2002) who add that kindergarten teachers need to find 'their own way to be heard in their schools' (p. 26).

It is clear from the discussion presented in this section that teachers working in early childhood and kindergarten education adopt a diverse range of roles as they carry out their work. It has also been argued that teachers need to fulfil not only the role of interacting with children but must also interact with their families. In addition, kindergarten teachers have additional roles because they often teach two different groups of children and are responsible for the provision of transition programs for children that will be attending kindergarten the following year and moving on to prep.

The literature presents a diverse view of kindergarten teaching although a noticeable absence is the views of kindergarten teachers themselves. It is not known how kindergarten teachers describe their roles nor is it known what roles kindergarten teachers perceive to be important in terms of their work. Through this study, it will be possible to address this gap in the literature through the provision of detailed accounts of the participating teachers' experience of working in kindergarten.

2.13 Summary of Chapter

In this chapter, I have developed the argument that kindergarten teachers take part in complex and diverse work that goes largely unrecognised by those involved in the provision of education. The perceptions of kindergarten teachers that are held by primary school principals and senior members of staff, the community, parents, as

well as teacher educators are often based on their own experience of kindergarten or from sources such as the media, resulting in a stereotypical view of kindergarten teachers' work.

This chapter has examined:

- What kindergarten is, its purpose and how it developed.
- Research that has been conducted in the area of early childhood and kindergarten education, and the absence of kindergarten teachers' voices and discussions of their work from much of this research.
- Teachers' work with an emphasis on teachers' beliefs, thinking and decision making.
- The reasons that individuals enter the teaching profession along with those aspects of their work that they find satisfying and dissatisfying.
- The kindergarten teacher, including a discussion on status.
- The Kindergarten teacher's roles in terms of the work undertaken in the classroom, school, and community domains.

In the following chapter, the methods and techniques adopted for use in the study are set out, providing a detailed account of how these have been used to gain greater insight into the world of kindergarten teachers and their work.

Chapter Three - Method

3.1 Introduction:

The purpose of the study is to provide an insight into the nature of kindergarten teachers' work through an examination of the experiences of four kindergarten teachers. In this chapter the methodology and data collection techniques that were applied in the study are discussed. In addition, the processes of analysing the data and presenting the experiences of the participants are addressed.

3.2 Research Perspective

Van Manen (1990) asserts, 'to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings' (p. 5). The emphasis on experience suggests that, everyone's experiences are different, that no single way of knowing is possible.

Research can be viewed as operating in two traditions, positivist and phenomenological (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). It is important that the two are regarded as separate entities, each having its own framework and guiding principles because qualitative research is not an adaptation of quantitative research, it is fundamentally different, with different traditions and different purposes (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The purposes of qualitative research are 'to describe and explain educational phenomena in depth, and often from the perspective of research participants' (Ryan & Campbell, 2001, p. 58). In this study, a qualitative approach to research was adopted because I was interested in exploring the nature of kindergarten teachers' work in an in-depth manner, from the perspective of the teachers.

There are certain studies that lend themselves to investigation through qualitative approaches (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This issue is explored by Barone (2001) who emphasises the provisional nature of knowledge and the manner in which researchers view the accompanying research process:

> they see studies of human phenomena as more subjective and humble enterprises... they opt for an epistemology of ambiguity that seeks out and celebrates meanings that are partial, tentative, incomplete, sometimes even contradictory, and originating from multiple vantage points. Such an epistemological stance seems appropriate to a project of educational inquiry whose role or purpose is the enhancement of meaning, rather than a reduction of uncertainty (pp. 152 – 153).

The aims of the study also influenced my decision to employ a qualitative approach to research. Rolfe and Mac Naughton (2001) assert that 'some studies have at their core the quest to describe and understand. To do this, researchers often favour qualitative approaches that encourage complexity and diversity in the research data' (p. 4). A key element in qualitative approaches is a celebration of complexity and diversity as ethnographic and case study approaches to research 'usually brings us closer to real human beings and everyday life. Rather than assuming a world of simplicity and uniformity, those who adopt a qualitative approach generally picture a world of complexity and plurality' (Orum, Feagin & Sjoberg, 1991, p. 23). In this study I recognise that social phenomena are inevitability complex, and it is this very complexity that yields richness in the data.

Eisner (1991) asserts 'if qualitative inquiry in education is about anything, it is about trying to understand what teachers and children do in the settings in which they work' (p. 11). In this sense, I sought to increase understanding of kindergarten teachers' work through questioning, disturbing and problematising the taken for granted rather than collecting evidence in a bid to enhance certainty. My emphasis was on 'research as a way of enlightening...by providing information which questions assumptions and offers fresh ways of interpreting familiar events (Edwards, 2001, p. 121). This was an important consideration because for the most part, kindergarten teachers' work is not the same as teachers working in other grade levels (Branscombe et al, 2000; Stamopoulos, 1998; Hargreaves, 1994).

The opportunity to use a range of different data gathering techniques also made a qualitative approach more appealing. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) list the techniques that qualitative researchers have available to them, including 'ethnographic prose, historical narratives, first person accounts, still photographs, life histories, fictionalised facts and biographical and autobiographical materials among others' (p. 11). The virtue of the diverse nature of qualitative research techniques is that it

provides a range of alternatives that can be matched not only to the purpose of the research being conducted but, provides a range of perspectives through which the phenomenon can be interrogated.

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) highlight this characteristic suggesting that 'qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them' (p. 3).

The adoption of a qualitative approach to research also provided an opportunity to 'get closer to the actor's perspective through the use of in-depth interviews and observations' (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 10). Qualitative researchers acknowledge the 'socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry' (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 8). The adoption of a constructivist perspective recognises the establishment of a respectful and interactive researcher-respondent relationship (Manning, 1997).

The work of Guba and Lincoln (1989) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) in which they developed a constructivist approach to research was instrumental in the design of this study. Merriam (1999) suggests that a constructivist stance 'maintains that learning is a process of constructing meaning; it is how people make sense of their experience' (p. 261). However, beyond this basis assumption, constructivists hold varying beliefs in regard to the nature of reality, the role of experience, what knowledge is of interest, and whether the process of meaning making is an individual or social process (Merriam, 1999)

One struggle that has often been associated with a constructivist orientation to research is that positivists have often asked the question ' "Which construction is right?" when the focus should be on "Which construction seems to take best account of that knowledge constructed to date – itself changeable – in the most sophisticated way?" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 70). I have adopted the view of Stake (1995) who advocates 'that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered' (pp. 99 – 100).

3.3 Methodology

Research and the direction that it takes is a product of choices or decisions. In this study, each decision was made in light of the overarching aim of the research, to develop an understanding of kindergarten teachers' work. To achieve this aim an ethnographic case study approach was developed. In addition, I also drew on elements of narrative inquiry during the study, particularly in relation to the presentation of each teacher's experience.

3.3.1 Ethnography

Ethnography is a common social science research method in educational research and has been particularly useful in early childhood settings where 'early childhood researchers have conducted ethnographic research for a wide range of purposes' (Siraj-Blatchford & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001a, p. 193).

Ethnography has its roots in the field of anthropology and is associated with describing how people behave and interact, a description of their daily way of life (Woods, 1986). Writing in the field of educational research, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) define ethnography not as an entity, but rather as an experience in which:

> the ethnographer participates, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions, in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which he or she is concerned (p. 1).

At the heart of earlier perceptions of ethnographic research is the view that the researcher recreates for the reader a "picture" of the group or culture under investigation. For example, Goetz & LeCompte (1984) suggest that 'ethnographies re-create for the reader the shared beliefs, practices, artefacts, folk language, and behaviours of some group of people' (p. 2). The notion of ethnographic research being used to describe culture is also shared by Spradley (1980) who believes that 'ethnography is the work of describing a culture. The central aim of ethnography is to understand another way of life from the native point of view' (p. 3)

Others question the possibility of recreating phenomena from a "native point of view". Walsh et al (1993) suggest that ethnography is a 'synonym for interpretive, contextually rich studies in classrooms' (p. 467), acknowledging that no description is free from interpretation.

The interpretive nature of ethnography is recognised by Siraj-Blatchford & Siraj-Blatchford (2001a) who state that 'ethnographic research is by its very nature interpretive, that is, it is concerned to understand the subjective world of human experience' (p. 194). Walsh et al (1993) also discuss the nature of interpretation in ethnographic research and suggest that the 'interpretation portion of interpretive research has a special nature that differentiates it from positivist work. Interpretation occurs while work is still ongoing and in the field' (p. 472).

I have also drawn on Denzin's (1997) notion of "interpretive ethnography". Denzin (1997) developed a thesis that examined the nature of ethnography as it has developed (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2000 for a complete discussion of the development of qualitative research approaches more generally). Denzin (1997) acknowledges that: theory, writing, and ethnography are inseparable; ethnography is imbedded in the culture in which it is conducted; the accounts of the experience of others are no longer considered objective and non-contested, instead, they must be responsive to the wishes of participants in terms of how they are represented; research is conducted from the perspective of all of the research participants.

In relation to interpretive ethnography, Denzin (1999) claims that it:

> refuses abstractions and high theory. It is a way of being in the world that avoids jargon and huge chunks of data. Viewing culture as a complex process of improvisation, it seeks to understand how people enact and construct meanings in their daily lives (p. 510).

This was of particular importance because of my interest in what kindergarten teaching is like for those who carry out this work on a daily basis. Interpretive ethnography provided access to how these teachers "enacted" and "constructed" meanings of their work. Importantly, the combination of theory generation, writing and ethnography was reflected in the research approach in this study.

Aubrey et al (2000) suggest that another aim of ethnography is 'to help us understand others and ourselves a little better' (p. 111). This view of ethnography serves to admit the researcher in a similar way to that outlined by Denzin (1997) who states that ethnography is 'form of inquiry that produces descriptions and accounts about the ways of life of the writer and those written about' (p. xi).

Writing recently, Atkinson and Hammersley (1998) acknowledge continuing conjecture surrounding the definitions of ethnography stating that 'definition of the term ethnography has been subject to controversy. For some it refers to a philosophical paradigm to which one makes a total commitment, for others it designates a method that one uses as and when appropriate' (p. 110).

I have utilised the ideas put forward by Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland and Lofland (2001), in which the adoption of ethnography is characterised by:

> a commitment to first-hand experience and exploration of a particular social or cultural setting on the basis of (though not exclusively by) participant observation. Observation and participation (according to circumstance and the analytic purpose at hand) remain the characteristic features of the ethnographic approach (pp. 4 – 5).

At various times throughout its history ethnography has been questioned on the basis of its inherent subjectivity. Similar claims are identified by Aubrey et al (2000) who believe that there are certain groups who maintain that the data are not reliable. Such claims have tended to be based on the notion that 'researchers exert undue (and hence distorting) influence on the participants who provide the data, on the data that are gathered, and on the subsequent analysis' (Aubrey et al, 2000, p. 118). However, ethnography has also 'been held in high esteem because surveys and other more structured experiments do not provide access to the social process and human activity' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 2).

In this study, the descriptive capacity of ethnographic research was important given the aim of the study was to gain an understanding of what the work of kindergarten teachers was like. The study also aimed to examine what kindergarten teachers thought about various facets of their work. Ethnographic research provided an avenue through which these aims could be satisfied. Ethnography was also utilised in

the study because it provides a means by which 'the fine-grained reality of educational processes within early childhood settings' (Siraj-Blatchford & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001a, p. 194) could be captured.

The adoption of an ethnographic approach to research was also undertaken because of the way participants are viewed in the research process. 'Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people' (Spradley, 1980, p. 3). The idea of learning from people while in the field sat more comfortably with me than the view that I was simply there to collect data which when written up in some form could lead to learning. The positioning of participants in ethnographic research is also recognised by Aubrey et al (2000) who suggest that ethnographic studies place 'those being studied as equal partners in the investigation' (Aubrey et al, 2000, p. 112).

Interpretive ethnography was also adopted because it is sensitive to how the experience of others is presented. Denzin (1999) argues that interpretive ethnography 'should also present a well-plotted, compelling, but minimalist narrative, based on realistic, natural conversation, with a focus on memorable, recognizable characters' (pp. 512 – 513).

3.3.2 Case Studies

Case study research, in a similar manner to ethnographic research, has been defined in a variety of ways and applied in a range of contexts. Case study research, according to Stake (1995) is built around elements borrowed from 'naturalistic, holistic, ethnographic, phenomenological and biographical research methods' (p. xi). Case studies are characterised by an intense interest in a single phenomena or issue and the collection of multiple sources of data using qualitative methods and techniques in the context in which it occurs (Stake, 1995). This view is also supported by Gillham (2000), Orum et al (1991) and Yin (1994). Stake (1995) suggests that 'in any given study, we will concentrate on the one... the time we spend concentrating on the one may be a day or a year, but while we so concentrate we are engaged in case research' (p. 2).

The phenomenon of kindergarten teachers' work was explored through the examination of four kindergarten teachers. The form of case study employed in this study lies at the intersection between instrumental and intrinsic approaches to case study research. An instrumental approach can be defined as an examination undertaken 'namely to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalisation' (Stake, 2000, p. 437) or when 'we have a research question, a puzzlement, a need for general understanding, and feel that we may get insight into the question by studying a particular case ' (Stake, 1995, p. 3). Alternatively, an intrinsic approach to case study can be defined as an examination undertaken because 'we are interested in it, not because by studying it we learn about other cases or about some general problem... we need to learn about that particular case' (Stake, 1995, p. 3). I was interested in learning about kindergarten teachers' work generally through the examination of four kindergarten teachers. However, I was also interested in the beliefs and teaching practices of each of these kindergarten teachers. These two purposes reflect both an intrinsic and extrinsic approach to case study research.

According to Orum et al (1991) there are four main advantages that case study methods offer researchers. First, observation and concepts can be grounded in natural settings. Second, case studies allow for a more holistic study through information being gathered from a variety of sources over a long period of time. Third, continuity and change can be studied through the application of case study methods. Finally, case study research facilitates innovation and "generalisation" in research (pp. 6 – 7).

Gillham (2000) suggests that 'a case can be an individual; it can be a group – such as a family or a class...it can be an institution – such as a school...it can be a large scale community – a town, an industry' (p. 1). In this study, the phenomenon of kindergarten teachers' work is explored through the examination of four "mini" cases, those of each kindergarten teacher.

The advantages of combining case study approaches with other forms of research has been recognised by Edwards (2001). In this study, case study has been incorporated with ethnography because as Seidman (1998) points out, research has many levels and the use of more than one avenue of inquiry provides access to these various levels.

The use of case study research was also adopted based on the views espoused by, Orum et al (1991) who suggest that case study methodology provides a holistic, in-depth method for investigation that draws on multiple perspectives and sources of information. This was particularly important considering that one intended aim of the study was to provide a clear description of what the work of a kindergarten teacher is like so that others may gain an insight into what teaching in a kindergarten is like. This was important because as Gillham (2000) suggests 'human behaviour, thoughts and feelings are partly determined by their context. If you want to understand people in real life, you have to study them in their context and in the way they operate' (p. 11). The use of multiple perspectives and sources of information allow a rich picture of human experience to be gained.

One of the main disadvantages associated with the use of case study methods is related to the nature of the sample in case study research. Yin (1994) has suggested that single or multiple case studies have been perceived as less desirable methods of inquiry when compared to those that provide increased opportunities for generalisation to a wider population such as survey based research. What can be learned from the single case is the central thesis of Stake's (1998) chapter on case study research in *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry.* This issue was also considered by Wolcott (1995) whose response of 'why, all we can!' (p. 171) to the question of what can be learnt from a single case is simple, yet telling. Still, the inability of case study research to be generalised poses no threat to the trustworthiness and credibility of the current study. The findings of this study may be transferable as readers recognise resonances with these teachers' experiences and their own. This discussion shall be pursued further in section 3.10 related to trustworthiness.

The importance of examining kindergarten teachers' work from the inside is that it provides a view of what it can be like to work in kindergarten classrooms. It may also provide those already working in kindergarten environments with an understanding of what their colleagues are doing. Further, through the provision of some "real life" examples of how kindergarten teachers go about their work, other school staff and the broader community gain an insight into what is a unique and often unrecognised part of the teaching profession. In addition, the study provides the

opportunity for self reflection and the opportunity to arrive at a deeper understanding of my own practice.

3.3.3 Narrative Inquiry

In this section an examination of definitions of narrative inquiry and narrative analysis, is presented, with a focus on how it has been applied to the study and the advantages that this application afforded. Cortazzi (1993) suggests that 'the typical narrative research report centres around one or two cases, richly presented. As narratives, these mark out an area of the reader's consciousness and remain in memory' (p. 19). In this instance, the number of cases has been increased, not because one or two were not considered enough, but because they provided an insight into a range of teaching experiences in kindergarten classrooms.

At the most general level, narrative or the act of narrating can be perceived of as telling a story (Lamarque, 1994). As narrative and narrative inquiry have gained greater prominence over the past 15 years, considerable attention has been paid to developing a deeper understanding of what it involves. Polkinghorne (1988) suggests that the term "narrative" can refer to 'the process of making a story, to the cognitive scheme of the story, or to the result of the process – also called "stories", "tales" or "histories"' (p. 13). Conle (2000) defines narratives in terms of their function when she states that 'narratives are about temporal events and [they] tell us where and when something happened, in which contexts, who said what to whom, with which feelings and in what mood, and under which moral constraints' (p. 56). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) view narrative inquiry as 'a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus' (p. 20). This notion has informed the development of the each of the chapters used to present the teacher's experiences.

For Cortazzi (1993), narrative inquiry places 'less emphasis on method and the life history of the teacher. It focuses less on problematic situations, life transitions and turning points and more on the everyday business of the classroom' (pp. 16 – 17) a concern reflected in my study. For Conle (2000), narrative inquiry tends to be open-ended, experiential and quest like in its orientation.

The adoption of narrative inquiry in the study provided five main advantages. First, it was compatible with the research approach that had been developed. Second, the use of narrative inquiry is consistent with approaches designed to research teaching and the lives of teachers. Third, narrative inquiry provided a means of allowing the reader to experience what it is like to be a kindergarten teacher. Fourth, the use of narrative inquiry served to generate rich description. Finally, the use of narrative inquiry offered rich possibilities in presenting research.

The adoption of narrative inquiry in the study was seen as complementing the research approach that had been developed. The use of ethnography and case study approaches to research were enhanced through the use of narrative, as 'ethnography is portrayed as essentially descriptive, or perhaps as a form of storytelling' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 1). Van Maanen (1988) suggests that the narrative strategies that are adopted by researchers can influence the resulting ethnography. 'Ways of personal expression, choice of metaphor, figurative allusions, semantics, decorative phrasing or plain speaking, textual organisation, and so on, all work to structure a cultural portrait in particular ways' (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 5). In addition, case study research in education typically focuses on people or programs. According to Stake (1995) this is important because 'we seek to understand them, we would like to hear their stories' (p. 1).

The techniques used to generate data within case study and ethnographic research, namely interviews and observations also benefited from the adoption of narrative inquiry. For example, Polkinghorne (1988) argues that 'narratives are a recurrent and prominent feature of accounts offered in all type of interviews' (p. 163).

The second advantage that narrative inquiry provided the study is associated with the aim of the study and the access that narrative provides to experience. The aim of the study was to describe the experience of teaching in kindergarten. The adoption of narrative techniques provided a viable means to achieve this. Polkinghorne (1988) suggests that there are two main forms of narrative that are utilised in research settings, descriptive and explanatory. In this study, it is the use of descriptive narrative that is of particular interest because the identification of what occurs is my primary concern rather than an explanation of why it occurs.

Polkinghorne (1988) believes that descriptive research aims to 'render the narrative accounts already in place which are used by individuals or groups as their means for ordering and making temporal events meaningful' (p. 161). Narrative inquiry also served as a viable means of providing readers with an insight into being a kindergarten teacher, because as Eisner (1997) points out narrative acts as a medium through which the reader can be placed in the situation, essentially helping us secure a sense of how it feels to be a kindergarten teacher. The adoption of narrative inquiry also enables the reader 'to hear teachers' voices and begin to understand their culture from the inside' (Cortazzi, 1993, p. 1).

In short, the use of narrative inquiry can serve to provide 'a "richer" view of life in familiar contexts: it can make the familiar strange, and the strange familiar' (Clough, 2001, p. 5). Eisner (1997) adds to this, suggesting that 'narrative when well crafted, is a spin to imagination, and through our imaginative participation in the worlds that we create we have a platform for seeing what we might call our "actual worlds" more clearly' (p. 261). The use of narrative inquiry also provided a means through which the thick description that was central to each account could be presented.

The adoption of narrative inquiry is also consistent with research into teaching. This is recognised by Carter (1993) who believes that 'story is a mode of knowing that resonates with teacher practice. It is action directed, sequenced and explains events, is temporal and culturally located and expresses the holistic nature of teaching and lives' (p. 5). This element of narrative inquiry is also acknowledged by Cortazzi (1993) who states that 'the study of teachers' narratives – teachers' stories of their own experience – is increasingly being seen as central to the study of teachers' thinking, culture and behaviour' (Cortazzi, 1993, p. 5). If we are to arrive at an understanding of what it is like to be a teacher, the 'narrative account must therefore carry the teacher's voice if researchers and other observers are to know what a teacher knows or feels. Indeed, how can anyone else know what is inside the teacher's head or heart without the teacher's commentary?' (Cortazzi, 1993, p. 11).

Finally, narrative inquiry solved some of the problems associated with reporting the results of the study. 'For qualitative researchers, narration provides the perfect vehicle for solving reporting problems' (Zeller, 1995, p. 76). This was particularly

important in this study as narration provided an avenue through which a day in each of the teacher's lives could unfold, or be retold. In the example provided by Zeller (1995) of how such a technique may be employed (The Math Class), she argues that the 'events unfold much as they occurred in the class; the reader can experience the class session somewhat as the researcher did' (p. 77 – 78). This was an important consideration in light of the goals of the study. I wanted the reader to be able to experience the classrooms of the kindergarten teachers in my study and be able to take away a sense of what I had seen in each classroom. I was not recreating reality, I was presenting a version of reality developed in light of the teacher's experience as well as my own. Clough (2001) recognises the role of narrative in research reports and states that:

> stories can provide a means by which those truths which cannot be otherwise told are discovered. Further, the fictionalisation of educational experience offers researchers the opportunity to import fragments of data from various "real" events in order to speak to a heart of social consciousness – thus providing the protection of anonymity to the research participants without stripping away the rawness of real happenings (p. 5).

3.4 Methods and Techniques

In this section I have provided a detailed account of the methods and techniques utilised in the generation of the study's data. In particular, the discussion focuses on the use of observations and interviews in the study.

3.4.1 Observation

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) state that 'all social research is founded on the human capacity for participant observation. We act in a social world, yet we are able to reflect upon ourselves and our actions as objects in that world' (p. 21). Through the use of observations I was able to record the data of interest directly from my observations of research participants (Rolfe, 2001). The directness of observations represents one of the main advantages associated with their use in the study. Observations are instant; events are played out in front of the researcher as 'it is not what people have written on the topic. It is not what they say they do. It is what they actually do' (Gillham, 2000, p. 46). The direct and naturalistic nature of qualitative

observation has also been acknowledged by Adler and Adler (1998) who state that qualitative observation:

> occurs in the natural context of the occurrence, among the actors who would normally be participating in the interaction, and follows the natural stream of everyday life. As such, it enjoys the advantage of drawing the observer into the phenomenological complexity of the world, where connections, correlations, and causes can be witnessed as and how they unfold (p. 81).

This was considered to be advantageous because the study was concerned with observing phenomenon in natural settings.

Conducting observations can be overwhelming during the initial period in the field due to the amount of activity to be observed and more importantly filtered, interpreted and recorded (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). To overcome this, I employed three main approaches to observation. First, time sampling was employed as a way of organising the observations (Rolfe, 2001). At five-minute intervals, I focused my attention on what the teacher was doing and with whom. After this information had been recorded, I allowed my attention to follow the other happenings in the classroom. The use of time sampling also helped to keep me focused after long periods of time in the field.

Second, descriptive narrative was utilised. This technique involved writing detailed long hand notes of particular events and issues as they occurred in the classroom (Rolfe, 2001). Finally, anecdotal records were also used to make the observation process manageable. Anecdotal records are similar to the descriptive narrative technique although the events are usually recorded after the event and in an "objective manner" (Rolfe, 2001).

In addition to the observation techniques outlined above, the aim of the research guided the observations. The study's main research question, "What is the nature of kindergarten teachers' work?" guided the classroom observations, placing the focus of the observations on the kindergarten teachers.

The use of observations as a method of data generation and collection is well established in early childhood settings. Observations are particularly suited for use in early childhood classrooms and research that involves early childhood teachers because, as Rolfe (2001) suggests:

> most early childhood students learn about techniques of systematic observation because consistent, careful observation is fundamental to good teaching. The techniques learnt for classroom practice – included running records and anecdotal records, checklists, rating scales and time and event sampling – are exactly those we apply in observational research (p. 224).

For the purposes of this study, participant observations are defined as the process in which the researcher establishes 'a place in some natural setting on a relatively long term basis in order to investigate, experience and represent the social life and social processes that occur in that setting' (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2001, p. 352). A detailed examination of my role during the observational process is presented in section 3.5 The Research's Role (pp. 99 – 101).

3.4.1.1 Recording Observations

The importance of recording observations is widely recognised. Taylor & Bogdan (1998) state that 'observations are only useful to the extent that they can be remembered and recorded' (p. 46). To this, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) add that 'the ideal would be to make notes during the actual participant observation... this is not always possible, and even when it is, the opportunities may be limited' (p. 176). However, this is directly dependant on the environment in which the observations are being conducted. The classroom environment and my freedom to move around within it enabled observations to be recorded for the majority of the time I was in the field. Emerson et al (2001) suggest that 'many field researchers act as blatant scribes, moving around, note pad in hand, visibly recording bits of talk and action as they occur' (p. 356), a description that accurately captures the manner in which the observations were recorded in this study.

During the day I was never without my 100 page, 8cm by 12cm notebook which fitted neatly into my back pocket. I became adept at reconstructing events, at times being able to see and hear events played out in my mind based on the details that I

recorded in my notebook. I also became increasingly observant and endeavoured to record every minute detail including details that seemed unimportant at the time. These details consisted of information about things that I could smell, the weather, what I was thinking about, the look on the teacher's face, toys that the children played with, and proved invaluable as I embarked on the task of writing the teacher's stories.

Initially, the teachers were conscious of my incessant note taking, however as time passed they saw this as part of my role. This is recognised by Emerson et al (2001) who suggest that by taking notes during the early stages of field work 'the ethnographer can establish a "note-taker" role and thus increase the likelihood that writing at the scene will be accepted (or at least tolerated)' (p. 356). At times, the teachers would check to see if I was writing certain information down during discussion of certain topics. In those instances this is mentioned in the resulting portraits of each teacher. At other times the teachers were simply curious about what I was writing. They would ask me and I would in turn show them the notes that I had made. This usually resulted in the teachers being surprised at the level of detail that the notes contained, including exact words spoken during conversations that they had with me or with members of their class.

There are times when those who have previously accepted open writing in their presence become 'upset when the researcher pulls out his pad and begins to write down their words and actions' (Emerson et al, 2001, p. 357). For example, I did not take notes when I engaged in informal conversation with either the teachers or other actors. In those situations I paid even closer attention to what was being said, employing effective listening techniques in which I would repeat parts of the conversation or provide summaries of what had been said. This conveyed my level of interest in the conversation as well as assisting me to retain as much of the content of the conversation as possible because I heard it twice. It is important to mention that while the term writing is used extensively in the development of the observations, mental notes were also taken during the time in the field and were perhaps more comprehensive than those notes committed to paper.

When I was not able to understand a particular utterance made by the teacher, these were recorded, with the possibility of being understood at a later time. This was an important consideration and allowed me to ask the teachers specific questions related to things that I had observed in the classroom and also things that they had commented on that I was not able to record accurately at the time of the observation. Taylor & Bogdan (1998) suggest events that were not understood at the time should be recorded in the observational notes. This was important, because in those instances when I had not heard what the teachers had said, their actions seemed out of place. These strategies provided me with a means to make sense of events.

3.4.1.2 Fieldnotes

The initial writing that was undertaken in the field represented the first stage in the development of the fieldnotes. The use of observations as a preliminary stage in the development of fieldnotes is recognised by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) and also by Emerson et al (2001) who suggest that the process of writing fieldnotes begins as soon as the ethnographer participates in the research settings, carrying out observations that will later be written up as fieldnotes.

Writing fieldnotes is concerned with the process of turning those observations written in the field into a detailed, comprehensive set of notes. Fieldnotes have been defined in a number of ways. For example, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) define fieldnotes as 'the traditional means in ethnography for recording observational data' (p. 175). More recently, Wolfinger (2002) has suggested that 'fieldnotes are an oft-neglected yet fundamental part of ethnography. They serve the crucial role of connecting researchers and their subjects in the writing of an ethnographic report' (p. 92). For the purposes of this study the description of fieldnotes provided by Emerson et al (2001) has been adopted in which they suggest that 'fieldnotes are intended to provide descriptive accounts of people, scenes and dialogue, as well as personal experiences and reactions' (Emerson et al, 2001, p. 353).

The importance of setting aside time for regular writing of field notes has been highlighted by Woods (1986) who suggests that if the notes are not written up in full as close to the time as possible 'the next day's event will soon be crowding in on those memories' (p. 45). Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) also recognise the

importance of finding time to write up fieldnotes, because there 'is no advantage in observing social action over extended periods if inadequate time is allowed for the preparation of notes' (p. 179). In this study, the observational notes taken during the day (both written and mental) were written up in full as soon after the observations as possible. This was usually undertaken the same evening or failing this, early the following morning prior to other observations being conducted. The fieldnotes were also written in as much detail as possible, including verbatim quotes made by those being observed. This was considered more beneficial than condensed summaries of the observations, because as Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) point out, 'when we compress and summarise we not only lose "interesting" detail and "local colour", we can lose vital information' (p. 182).

The process of writing fieldnotes is not an easy one, although one '... which is facilitated by taking considerable time to write immediately after one leaves the field' (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 73). The difficult nature of writing fieldnotes is also recognised by Woods (1986) who adds that while 'these are indeed tiring times for the ethnographer ... there are no short cuts' (p. 45). Great care was taken during the development of the fieldnotes because 'writing fieldnotes, rather than writing finished ethnographies, provides the primal, even foundational moments of ethnographic representation: for most ethnographic monographs rely upon, incorporate and may even be built from these initial fieldnotes' (Emerson et al, 2001, p. 352).

The way in which fieldnotes are written will vary amongst researchers (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995). However, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) suggest that because fieldnotes 'constitute a central research activity, it should be carried out with as much care and self-conscious awareness as possible' (p. 175). Emerson et al (2001) are less concerned with care and self-conscious awareness, commenting that:

> In actually sitting down and writing fieldnotes, the ethnographer often experiences an outpouring of memories, thought and words. Knowing that memories fade as time passes, most fieldworkers write fieldnotes in a rush using whatever phrasing and organisation seem more accessible, convenient and do-able at the time. Thus, fieldnotes have a distinctive writing style marked by flowing, even hurried, outbursts of words, often dashed down on the page in uncensored, yet focused ways (p. 358).

The fieldnotes that were developed during this study reflect the processes described above. In many instances they were written with no formal outcome in mind, rather the aim was to recreate and capture the events of the day in as much detail as possible. However, care was taken to include sufficient detail to ensure that they would make sense at a later time.

Writing fieldnotes is a subjective practice which is recognised by Emerson et al (2001) who claim that the 'ethnographer writes about certain things that seem "significant", ignoring and hence "leaving out" other matter that do not seem significant' (p. 353). This subjective nature of fieldnotes is also recognised by Wolfinger (2002) who suggests that 'in sitting down to record notes, ethnographers can start by describing whatever observations struck them as the most noteworthy, the most interesting or the most telling' (p. 89). The act of recording observations is subjective and dependent on the lens adopted by the researcher. The notion of subjectivity is considered further in section 3.8.1 Credibility (pp. 107 – 109).

The field notes also became an important space for me to reflect on what I had seen and heard during the course of the day. I would jot down ideas, highlight things to follow up, and write down any thoughts that may be relevant at a later date regarding what was said or done by a particular individual. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) recognise the importance of these types of notes and state that 'the construction of such notes therefore constitute precisely the sort of internal dialogue, or thinking aloud, that is the essence of reflexive ethnography' (pp. 191 - 192). These notes, in line with the advice of Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) were included in the fieldnotes.

Fieldnotes, although revered by ethnographers are not without their limitations. This is recognised by Van Maanen (1988) who suggests that:

> the heavy glop of material we refer to as fieldnotes is necessarily incomplete and insufficient. It represents the recorded memory of a study perhaps, but it is only a tiny fraction of the fieldworker's own memory of the research period (p. 118).

More recently this point has been reiterated by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) who believe:

> fieldnotes cannot possibly provide a comprehensive record of the research setting. The ethnographer acquires a great deal more tacit knowledge than is ever contained in the written record...one should not become totally wedded to the fieldnotes, as if they were the sum of total available information (p. 185).

While Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) and Van Maanen (1988) point to the short comings of fieldnotes, the usefulness of these very much depend on how they are employed in the research process. In this study, fieldnotes were used as a 'form of representation, that is, as a way of reducing just observed events, persons and places to written accounts' (Emerson et al, 2001, p. 353).

Maps of each kindergarten classroom were also incorporated into the fieldnotes (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The maps were not developed in a formal sense on grid paper and to scale. Instead they were free hand sketches of the floor plan of the room and included details such as where the teacher's chair was placed, the location of various materials or where certain activities were undertaken. The use of maps served to evoke clearer mental images of each classroom and events that took place within them.

3.4.2 Interviews

Research interviews have been defined in a number of ways throughout their history, although the variation in definitions is usually associated with the degree of structure that is applied to the interview process. For the purposes of the study, the semi-structured interview was adopted because it provided 'greater breadth than the other types of interviewing...' (Fontana & Frey, 1998, p. 56).

In this study, research interviews are viewed in a similar light to that of Kvale (1996) who states that the 'research interview is based on the conversation of daily life and is a professional conversation' (p. 5). The conversational aspect of interviews in qualitative research is also acknowledged by Cannold (2001) who suggests that interviews are 'conversations between researcher and participant in which the researcher seeks to elicit the participant's subjective point of view on a topic of interest to the researcher' (p. 179).

The interviews conducted in the study were not rigidly structured although each of the teachers was asked the same basic questions. However, additional questions were used as the need arose to follow a particular theme or to elicit greater detail in regard to a specific topic. The use of semi-structured interviews offered the study a number of advantages; in particular, semi-structured interviews are powerful in terms of gaining insight into the experience of others. Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford (2001b) believe interviews provide participants with the highest levels of freedom in terms of the response they are able to offer to a particular question. This was an important consideration in the study given that I was interested in the experience of being a kindergarten teacher. In addition, interviews also enabled me to 'gain an understanding of the meanings that participants give to their lives' (Cannold, 2001, p. 179). Fontana and Frey (1998) assert that interviews are 'one of the most common and powerful ways we use to try and understand our fellow human beings' (p. 47).

The use of interviews also offered access to those elements of kindergarten teaching that are not visible (Seidman, 1998). In the past, observation has been the hallmark of ethnography and case study research although ethnographic work in educational research had tended to become more reliant on data generated through interview (Woods, 1986). Walford (2001) has also criticised the absence of observational data in these types of studies and believes that 'much research would benefit from greater time being spent in observing the activities of others and recording these observations in field notes, and less time being spent in trying to construct "hard" data from ephemeral conversations' (p. 96). Coffey and Atkinson (1996) point out that interviewing does not provide access to naturally occurring interaction. In addition, 'they certainly do not give access to how people actually perform a wide variety of daily tasks' (p. 19).

The use of interviews as a secondary source of data reduced the severity of these disadvantages although they still remained important considerations throughout the research process. The views of Walford (2001) were considered in this sense and the interview data were used to supplement the observations rather than the other way round.

Although, the use of interviews as a stand alone method of data generation is well recognised, Keats (1988) recognises the advantages of combining observations and interviews, suggesting that 'interviews may add valuable, subjective, explanatory material' (p. 18). It was the potential of interviews in this regard that made them an attractive option for the study.

There were also a number of other advantages associated with the use of interviews in the study. These included the capability of interviews to generate a large amount of data in a relatively short period of time; the opportunity for participants to express their opinions related to a range of issues because these are not accessible through observations; and the opportunity for the researcher to ask questions related to specific events or issues that may not come about in other situations (Walford, 2001). Each of these aspects were deemed important for the study.

Kvale (1996) draws on the metaphor of a *miner* and a *traveller* to characterise the differing nature of the interview. The *miner* treats knowledge as 'buried metal and the interviewer is the miner who unearths the valuable metal' (p. 3). If I were a *miner,* I would simply be looking in the location where I know, from reading geographical charts, I will find the precious metals and once found, gather them together. On the other hand, if I were to adopt the role of *traveller* I would assume the interview process was a 'journey that leads to a tale to be told upon returning' (Kvale, 1996, p. 4). I would wander around, exploring, using maps at other times, and drawing on the experiences of those that I meet along the way.

The new understandings that are gained through the interview process are not the only outcomes of research of this nature. Kvale (1996) implies that 'the journey may not only lead to new knowledge, the traveller might change as well' (p. 4). I did not complete the journey on my own; each of the four teachers accompanied me as co-travellers engaged in a constant negotiation with me related to the next direction of the journey. I did not simply search for new knowledge, I found the process changed me. Additionally, it is possible that the teachers involved in the study have also been changed (Kvale, 1996). Clandinin (1986) recognises the capacity of research to bring about change as the 'process of working together in the classroom, of offering interpretations and of talking together, is a shared meaning. Neither teacher nor

researcher emerges unchanged' (p. 20). For this reason the relationships that were established during the journey are important. The way in which the traveller acts, questions and responds to others shapes the journey and ultimately the way in which co-travellers will retell their experience (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

The metaphor of the traveller also recognises the role of the researcher as a participant in constructing understanding as opposed to a *miner* who tends to view 'knowledge as given' (Kvale, 1996). This clearly had implications for the research perspective adopted for the study, as it is one that is predominately constructivist in its orientation.

I am not sure that the distinction between *miner* and *traveller* is always clear. I was certainly a *traveller* during the interview process although at times I think that I was also a *miner* because I needed to find precious metals to take back with me. To the metaphor developed by Kvale (1996) could be added *souvenir hunter*, I collected mementoes of the journey, proof if you like of where I went and what I found.

The interview process adopted for use in the study is based upon the three-stage interview model put forward by Seidman (1998). In this approach, interviewers use primarily open-ended questions. It is important that the three stages of the interview process are adhered to, as each of the interviews serves a distinct purpose and as Seidman (1998) writes, 'each interview provides a foundation of detail that helps illuminate the next' (p. 13).

The development of the interview questions was influenced by the purposes of each interview in Seidman's (1998) model. In addition, the guiding questions were also based on the study's research questions along with issues distilled through an examination of the literature. One source of literature that was particularly influential in this regard was Dinham and Scott's (1996) study *The Teacher 2000 Project*. The study sought to address the main elements that influence change in teachers' work through the use of questions such as; why do teachers enter teaching? How do teachers feel about teaching? What aspects of their role do they find satisfying? And what do teachers find to be dissatisfying? These questions were utilised in the current study as a starting point for the interviews.

3.4.2.1 First Interview

The focus of the first interview in Seidman's model is 'to put the participants' experiences in context by asking him or her to tell as much as possible about themselves in light of the topic up to the present time' (Seidman, 1998, p. 11). The teachers were informed that the interview was open ended and as a result they would largely determine what was discussed during the interview. Prior to the first interview being conducted, the teachers were provided with an outline of the question that was to be addressed in the interview, which was "I would like you to describe the events or experiences that led you to where you are now as a kindergarten teacher?" In addition, the teachers were also provided with examples of possible issues they may like to consider. These included: why they had entered the teaching profession, what their teacher training was like, how they came to be teaching in kindergarten and any other experiences or events that had influenced them as a kindergarten teacher.

The provision of an outline of discussion points was considered necessary after the pilot stage of the interview process demonstrated that it was difficult for a number of teachers to know where to start without being provided with some guidance. It was stressed at the time of the first interviews that the suggestions that had been put forward were not specific issues that I wanted them to discuss, but rather provided a direction for the interview should they find it difficult to ascertain a starting point.

3.4.2.2 Second Interview

The purpose of the second interview was 'to concentrate on the concrete details' (Seidman, 1998, p. 12) of the teachers' present experiences in the topic area of the study. During the second interview the kindergarten teachers were asked, "What is your work as a kindergarten teacher like for you?" and "Can you take me through a day in your life as a kindergarten teacher?"

The second interview also provided an opportunity for the teachers 'to re-construct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs' (Seidman, 1998, p. 11). During the second interview the teachers were not provided with any additional information related to possible issues of discussion, as they were familiar

with the process. In addition, the second interview focused on the teachers and their feelings, a topic on which they possessed all the answers.

3.4.2.3 Third Interview

During the third interview the teachers were encouraged to reflect on the meaning of their experiences, specifically the 'intellectual and emotional connections between the participants' work and lives' (Seidman, 1998, p. 12). In this third stage of the interview process the following lead-in question was used, "You have told me about the events that led you to your work as a kindergarten teacher and what your work is like for you, I would now like you to tell me what it means for you to be a kindergarten teacher?"

The use of a broad lead-in question, such as the one outlined above, placed the teachers in a position where, through a 'combination of exploring the past to clarify the events that led [them] to where they are now, and describing the concrete experiences of their present experience' (Seidman, 1998, p. 12) they had the necessary 'conditions for reflecting upon what they are doing now in their lives' (Seidman, 1998, p.12).

3.4.2.4 Timing and Conduct of the Interviews

The interviews were conducted with each teacher while I was at the school conducting observations in their classroom. Heyl (2001) suggests that ethnographic interviews are those in which:

> researchers have established respectful, on-going relationships with their interviewees, including enough rapport for there to be a genuine exchange of views and enough time and openness in the interviews for the interviewees to explore purposefully with the researcher the meanings they place on events in their worlds (p. 369).

In order to ensure that relationships and rapport were established with each teacher, interviews were conducted only after a minimum of four sessions had been observed. The development of effective relationships and rapport with each teacher was made more important because as Heyl (2001) suggests 'what the interviewees in each

study choose to share with the researchers reflects the conditions of their relationship and the interview situation' (p. 370).

Each of the interviews was conducted in the teacher's classroom, at a time convenient for them. Prior to the first interview being conducted, each teacher was provided with a copy of the interview schedule so that they were able to consider the issues that were applicable; this practice is advocated by Stake (1995).

The length of time between each of the interviews was initially determined in light of the recommendations made by Seidman (1998) who suggested the interviews be spaced between three days and one week apart. This timing allows the participants and the researcher to reflect on the previous interview, and at the same time, to maintain the connection between the interviews. The rigours of field work and the busy schedules of some teachers did not always allow this to happen. Consequently, the timing of interviews was responsive to individual settings. In two instances the interviews were undertaken concurrently and in others, the interviews were scheduled up to two weeks apart. While every intention was made to ensure the research process advanced in the rigorous manner outlined in the guiding literature, ultimately it is the participants who determine the time frame for data collection within the study.

The provision of initial schedules allowed the teachers to gauge approximately how long the interview would take which ensured that they were able to 'schedule the interviews around the other duties that they must undertake, and provided enough time so that the participants feel... what they have to say is being taken seriously' (Seidman, 1998, p. 14). The interviews varied in duration, some lasting 40 minutes while others ran for more than an hour.

3.4.2.5 Recording the Interviews

The use of tape recorders in interview research is subject to much debate. Views on the issue tend to range from definitely not to certainly. The main criticism levelled against the use of tape recorders is their influence on the participants, that is, tape recording somehow alters the proceeding of events. This is somewhat irrelevant

considering the whole interview process can be considered contrived and the use of a tape recorder is but one part of the interview process.

If a tape recorder is used, the impact of its presence can 'quickly fade(s) to the background' (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 98). Steps were taken to ensure that the presence of the tape recorder did not put the teachers off or make them feel uncomfortable. A tape recorder with a flat, tabletop microphone was used and provided the advantage of allowing the tape recorder to be placed out of sight, the slim profile of the microphone the sole reminder of the tape recorders presence. I also assured the teachers that; the tapes were not for public broadcast; I would remove names or any other information that may identify them; and I would ensure that once the tapes were no longer required (for both my own purposes and the requirements of the ethics committees) they would be destroyed.

3.4.2.6 Transcription of the Interview Data

There are two options in regard to the transcription of interview data, do it yourself, or get someone else to do it. Woods (1986) argues that 'without doubt, these are best transcribed by the researcher, however tedious a task it may seem' (p. 82). The transcription of the interview data was indeed a slow process because 'as a simple rule of thumb, a one hour interview is ten hours of transcription and almost as many hours of analysis' (Gillham, 2000, p. 65). Despite the process being slow and somewhat repetitive, Kvale (1996) argues that transcription is not 'a simple clerical task...transcription itself is an important interpretive process' (p. 16) and for this reason it was important that I undertook the transcription so that I could extend control over such decisions.

I also transcribed each of the interviews because this represented one of the first stages through which the data were transformed. 'Structuring the material into texts facilitates an overview and is in itself the beginning of analysis' (Kvale, 1996, p. 169). This process allowed me to become familiar with the each of the teacher's stories, and provided the opportunity to explore initial themes.

The process of transcription, which is essentially altering the nature of language from spoken to written, required careful consideration. One of the difficulties associated with the transcription of interview data is that the nuances of spoken language are lost when the data is transformed from speech to text. The way in which words are spoken can convey as much of the meaning as the actual words that are uttered. In this sense 'transcriptions are not copies or representations of some original reality, they are interpretive constructions' (Kvale, 1996, p. 165).

The decision to transcribe the interviews verbatim or in summary form was carefully considered because as Gillham (2000) suggests, 'verbatim transcription brings home to you that much of what people say is redundant or repetitive' (p. 71). While this was the case to a certain extent, I thought that those issues or concepts that were reiterated during each of the interviews were of note, in particular when patterns began to emerge in each of the interviews. If the interviews were not transcribed verbatim there is also the possibility that they would be further de-contextualised, opening up the possibility of participants being misrepresented. In order to avoid this problem, Maykut and Morehouse (1994) 'recommend writing down everything that has been recorded on tape. No short cuts' (p. 101).

Once the interviews were transcribed and reviewed by the participants, amendments were made. In particular, individual speech patterns as well as incomplete thoughts, and sentences were removed. Following this, the participants were provided with the opportunity to review their own narrative case study at two other key stages of the research process. This is covered in detail in section 3.10 Presentation of the Teachers' Experiences (p. 117).

I was initially tentative in manipulating the words of the teachers. However, Wolcott (1994) suggests that one should edit 'words as necessary to help readers read and to put informants in the best possible light' (p. 66). In addition, Wolcott advocates the removal of material that is not of relevance to the research aim as well as correcting non-standard English. These two procedures were utilised during the transcription of the interview data.

3.4.3 Pilot of Methods and Techniques

Prior to observations and interviews being conducted, they were piloted with four teachers who were not taking part in the study proper. Presented in this section is an overview of how each of the data collection techniques were piloted.

The skills and techniques related to conducting observations were developed through a careful examination of the literature associated with ethnography and participant observation. In addition, observations were also conducted with a small number of teachers. This provided the opportunity to refine observation techniques and also provided an insight into the type of data that would be generated. The piloting of the observation techniques resulted in observations being deemed appropriate for use in the study proper in their piloted form.

Prior to the interviews being conducted with each of the kindergarten teachers the interview questions were piloted with four early childhood teachers. Cannold (2001) recognises the importance of piloting interview questions and states that 'it is beneficial to pilot the interview guide on somewhere between four and ten participants, during which time critical adjustments may be made to the content, phrasing and order of the questions, or even the characteristics of the research sample' (p. 182). In this instance, the questions were piloted with four early childhood teachers to determine the nature of the data that each of the questions would produce. In addition, the level of difficulty of answering each of the questions and the way in which the teachers interpreted them was also examined. Through this process I was able to make a number of small changes to the wording of the questions in order to make them easier to answer and also to sharpen their focus.

During the pilot stage of the study, participants appeared uncomfortable and remained silent or continually asked me "Is that what you wanted?" Providing the participants with a copy of the interview schedule helped to alleviate this problem.

3.5 The Researcher's Role

The nature of my relationship with others in the field, as well as my role in each of the classrooms, was something that I needed to consider very early in the research

process, as an ethnographer and participant observer. In this regard, Wolcott (1994) suggests that 'somewhere between "going out to places" and "coming back with information" every fieldworker has to achieve some workable balance between participating and observing' (p. 95). Woods (1986) raises an interesting question in regard to observations, why participate? For Woods, the answer is based on the belief that 'the central idea of participation is to penetrate the experiences of others within a group or institution' (p. 33).

The discussion associated with the role of participation or non-participation is something that tends to be portrayed as a fixed point, a decision that must be made. However, Gillham (2000) suggests that each form of observation, participant or non-participant, represents two ends of a continuum: rather than choosing one of the other, the researcher moves between the roles. I was free to move between roles depending on the data that I needed to collect or the situations in which I found myself. For example, there were times that I participated in an aspect of the kindergarten program such as when one of the teachers would ask me to supervise an activity or help a particular child.

Adler and Adler (1998) believe that one of the hallmarks of observation has traditionally been its non-interventionism, where 'observers neither manipulate nor stimulate their subjects' (p. 80). This is essentially a rather naive view because as Walsh (1998) suggests, the researcher's position in the field is 'not a fly on the wall, the researcher is there' (p. 91). The influence of the observer is also documented by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) who suggest that this is known as the 'problem of the influence of the observer on the observed...it can perhaps be seen more clearly that we are shaping the parade of events as we study the parade' (p. 89).

Initially, this was something that I was conscious of because my presence in the classroom would influence and shape the events that take place, albeit in a subtle way. I did not have any firm criteria by which I would determine the nature of my role, but to be able to access a range of activities and conversations, I needed to be in a position of involvement with the goings on in the classroom. I considered my role carefully and decided that I would be responsive to the context and participate at

times and not at others. When the observer becomes a participant in the setting under investigation it also serves to open up access to the field.

These were important considerations in terms of the observations that were undertaken. It would be naïve to assume that my being in the classroom with pen and paper in hand would not have an influence. In some instances, influence such as this would be avoided. In this study I encouraged it. It should be noted however, that this is one of the main criticisms levelled against observation as a method of data collection (Gillham, 2000). The teacher, teacher assistant, children, parents and anyone else who were around would interact with me, thus adding another dimension to the data.

While in the field, Goetz and LeCompte (1984) discuss how the researcher should act, suggesting that they may enter the field with 'an assumption of ignorance or naïveté ... others simply attempt to suspend preconceived notions and even existing knowledge of the field under study' (p. 9). Acting in a naive manner allowed apparently simple questions to be asked without the teachers feeling that their time was being wasted (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). In the field, I acted in a manner naïve enough to be privy to explanations and descriptions of events or rationales for various actions in the classroom while at the same time being knowledgeable enough as an early childhood professional, albeit an early career one, to understand what I was being told.

3.6 The Participants

At the heart of selecting a sample for a research study, regardless of whether it is quantitative or qualitative in nature, is the goal of securing a sample that is either representative of a wider population or that provides detailed information related to a specific event or issue (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander, 1995). Specifically, as I wanted detailed information about an issue I went to those who held the information. In ethnographic and case study research 'sampling is recursive and ad hoc rather than fixed at the outset' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p. 143). The study sought variety in terms of the Economic Needs Index (ENI) of the school, the experience and the gender of the teachers.

In order to examine kindergarten teachers' work across a range of settings, the ENI of each school was used as a stratifying criterion. Four schools in Northern Tasmania were selected, two schools with low ENI's and two schools with high ENI's. The government ENI level of a school provides an indication of the economic background of the community the school serves and is calculated using a number of criteria. The specific ENI levels of each school have not been provided to ensure that it is not possible to identify individual schools and subsequently the teachers involved in the study.

The kindergarten teachers were experienced educators having taught for an average of 21 years. The teachers had been teaching kindergarten specifically for an average of 8 years. Sarah, Lucy and Sam had considerable teaching experience in kindergarten and early childhood education. Anastasia, while having considerable experience teaching in early childhood classes, had been teaching kindergarten for approximately two years. All of the teachers taught in government schools. In three out of four research sites the kindergarten was on the same grounds as the primary school campus. The fourth kindergarten was a separate site kindergarten.

A gender balance was also sought in terms of the composition of the sample. This was made more difficult due to a significant shortage of males who teach in the area of kindergarten education. However, one male teacher, Sam was involved in the study and given the number of males involved in the provision of early childhood education this was considered satisfactory.

The selection of the sample for the study utilised non-probability sampling techniques. More specifically, the study employed purposive and convenience sampling techniques. A purposive sampling approach 'involves the conscious selection by the researcher of certain subjects or elements to include in the study' (Burns & Groves, 1995, p.243). As the study focused on the nature of kindergarten teachers' work, the teachers needed to be currently teaching in a kindergarten setting.

I knew two of the teachers previously through teaching and research experiences. The other two teachers were not known to me and for this reason reputation sampling was also employed in the study. Cohen et al (2000) suggest that this form of

sampling is based on extreme and variant case sampling and involves the researcher selecting participants based upon the recommendations of experts in the field.

The use of convenience sampling techniques were utilised in the study because as Grbich (1999) suggests, the purpose of 'convenience sampling is to locate a group of people as quickly as possible in order to maximise convenience and minimise cost' (p. 70). Convenience sampling was adopted for use in the study because it provided a means of selecting schools that were in close proximity to the University. This was important, as repeated visits to each of the research sites were necessary. Walford (2001) suggests that while convenience should not be the sole reason for selecting a sample 'it is understandable that academics and research students should include convenience in their consideration of which sites to approach to try to gain access. There are time, financial and personal costs to be considered' (p. 14).

There are a number of criticisms levelled against the use of non-probability sampling techniques. However, most of these are associated with the inability to determine whether the sample is representative of the broader population. Another disadvantage of opportunity or convenience sampling is associated with the inability to generalise to a wider population (Burns, 1997). This may pose a significant problem for quantitative research endeavours in which generalisation is an intended outcome. However, for the purposes of qualitative research, where generalisation is not an aim, this is not an issue.

3.7 Gaining and Maintaining Access

There is a wealth of literature associated with issues of gaining access to research sites. In most accounts, access is perceived as being a difficult element of conducting field work because 'access and entry are sensitive components in qualitative research' (Janesick, 1998, p. 40). However, Walford (2001) argues that gaining access is not as difficult a task as is presented in research and methodological literature. The process of gaining access, whether difficult or not, is important. This has been recognised by Seidman (1998) who has suggested the way in which access is gained to the research site can have an impact on the relationships that are developed with the participants and holds implications for each of the subsequent steps in the research approach.

I had clear guidelines to follow which had been handed down by the University of Tasmania's Ethic Committee and the Department of Education's Ethics Committee that related to the recruitment of participants. Further, I believe I have the type of personality that allows me to relate to a broad range of people with relative ease. I had read numerous research texts associated with ethnography and field work which outlined what the researcher had to do in order to secure access. For example, Janesick (1998) suggested that the 'researcher must establish trust, rapport and authentic communication patterns with participants' (p. 40). Alternatively, Goetz and LeCompte (1984) suggest that initiating and maintaining contact require 'researchers to present themselves as sincere individuals ...the most significant elements in obtaining access and entry are researcher flexibility and sensitivity' (p. 40). In light of these types of discussions about the researcher and the personal characteristics necessary to gain access, it is evident that one must be able to establish and maintain relationships, something that could be easy in some instances and difficult in others.

The process of gaining access to each research site was similar to that described by Walford (2001) who suggests that the issue of access can be viewed as an 'incremental continuum, where the researcher is gradually able to move from the initial permission to enter the building to a series of trusting relationships with some teachers and students' (p. 34). Undertaking intensive reading on the topic of gaining access, which outlined the importance of this aspect in the overall research process, proved unsatisfactory. The experiences of others, while similar in ways, were not the same as mine. Much of the literature tended to focus on the necessary steps to follow. I was faced with the dilemma of how could the steps outlined by authors, often working in a different country, be applied to my situation? Rather than presenting a heavily referenced account of how I managed to gain and more importantly maintain access, I have presented an account of what I did in order to place myself where I needed to be, in kindergarten classrooms.

I selected a number of schools based on their ENI as well as their location in terms of proximity to the University. In total five schools were selected and subsequently contacted by telephone. I arranged a meeting with each school's principal to talk about the nature of the study and what I would like to do whilst at the school. I met with four of the five principals; one of the principals gave permission for the study to

proceed at the time of the initial telephone conversation. Of the remaining four principals, three provided me with permission to approach the kindergarten teachers while the fourth denied access to the school.

I already knew two of the kindergarten teachers so I called in to see them at the end of the school day. We discussed the nature of the study and what their involvement would require. The teachers agreed and I provided them with a copy of the information sheet and statement of informed consent, as outlined by the University of Tasmania's Ethics Committee and the Department of Education's Ethics Committee. I did not know the other two teachers. They had been selected based on the recommendations of experts in the field. I contacted them by telephone, providing them with a verbal overview of the study. They indicated that they were interested in taking part in the study. A time to meet with the teachers was arranged and they were provided with a detailed account of what participation in the study would require. Once again, the teachers were provided with a copy of the information sheet and statement of informed consent. Following the meeting, both of the teachers were happy to participate.

Other than one principal denying access to the school, the remainder of the principals and teachers were most accommodating. I was granted access to the entire research site at three of the sites, where I was free to come and go as I pleased. It should be noted, that at times while I was privy to certain conversations and discussions of various issues and my access was not restricted, the teachers or other participants involved would monitor my behaviour and the observations I would make.

At the fourth site, my access was somewhat more restricted and I was provided with a list of days and times that I was able to conduct observations in the kindergarten classroom. I did not try to renegotiate this timetable and accepted this. I was not sure whether this level of access was attributed to other responsibilities of the teacher or whether my presence may have been perceived as disruptive.

The nature of the relationships I developed with each teacher changed as the research process progressed. The effectiveness of these relationships was vitally important because if researcher / participant relationships are positive, 'participants will be

more willing to share everything, warts and all, with the researcher' (Janesick, 1998, p. 40).

Just as gaining and maintaining access to research sites is an important aspect of conducting research, leaving the field is also important. Stake (1995) suggests that 'it is often unclear when the final visit is, each could be the last' (p. 60). In each instance, I made several visits to the research sites, even though formal data collection had ceased as I wanted to personally thank those involved in the research process and explain that the formal data collection phase of the research had been completed.

I found the process of gaining and maintaining access straight forward and free from the difficulties that are often central to the accounts provided by other researchers. This may be attributed to the nature of the research, the participants themselves, my personality and my conduct as a researcher. Nevertheless, I found the process of gaining and maintaining access to be a thoroughly enjoyable process; this was perhaps one of the easier tasks that I was faced with during the field work.

Observations were conducted at each of the research sites from the middle of the 2nd Term (August) until the end of the 3rd Term (December) of the 2001 Tasmanian school year. The program that was offered at each of the research sites varied. Lucy and Sarah taught both half-day and full-day kindergarten whilst Anastasia and Sam taught only half-day kindergarten. For this reason, observations were conducted during each kindergarten session offered at each site. For example, if the kindergarten provided half-day sessions on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday in the mornings and the afternoons, observations were conducted at least once for the entirety of each day. Observations were conducted at each site for approximately 15 sessions, which translates into nearly 50 hours of observation per site. In those instances where both full-day and half-day kindergarten was offered, full-day sessions were counted as two sessions.

3.8 Trustworthiness

There are a range of opinions related to whether there is even a need to discuss these issues at all in qualitative research. For example, Wolcott (1995) suggests that the

decision to discuss the terms is based on 'whether we are willing to accept the language of quantitative researchers as the language of all research, or whether different approaches, like different art forms, warrant different criteria for judging them' (p. 168). I agree with the notion that different research approaches require different criteria and for this reason, the terms developed by Guba and Lincoln (1985), credibility, transferability and dependability are examined in order to determine the trustworthiness of the study.

3.8.1 Credibility

In this study, credibility has been used to replace the term internal validity. In a traditional sense, internal validity is concerned with 'whether a researcher has measured what the research purports to measure' (Wolcott, 1995, p. 169). Credibility, in terms of this study can be considered as 'a judgement about the extent to which it can be said that the researcher has captured important features of the field and has analysed them with integrity' (Edwards, 2001, p. 124).

In this study, I was the main instrument of data generation. Therefore, I determined the important aspects associated with the phenomena under consideration. Decisions associated with what was important and worthy of consideration were made in light of informed conversations with each of the teachers. This process is subjective as 'the intent of qualitative researchers to promote a subjective research paradigm is a given. Subjectivity is not seen as a failing needing to be eliminated but as an essential element in understanding' (Stake, 1995, p. 45).

Subjectivity is an important consideration in research. This is acknowledged by Eisner (1992) who suggests that:

> objectivity is one of the most cherished ideals of the educational research community. In fact, it is so important that if our work is accused of being subjective, its status as a source of knowledge sinks slowly into the horizon like a setting sun (p. 9).

It is in this instance that choice of method becomes important. In quantitative research, subjectivity needs to be avoided, whereas 'ethnography admits the subjective experience of both investigator and participant into the research frame,

thus providing depth of understanding often lacking in other approaches to research' (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 9). In this study, subjectivity was not avoided, instead it was seen as an advantage because it demanded that I was continuously open to new interpretations of familiar events (Edwards. 2001). Being open to the field is also recognised by Wolcott (1994) who suggests that unlike the quantitative researcher who aims to exercise control, the qualitative researcher is more concerned with being intuitive, ready to act on opportunities. That is, subjectivity is perceived as something to be celebrated rather than limited.

While discussing the choices of qualitative research methods in studying personal practical knowledge, Clandinin (1986) states that as a researcher she cannot 'enter into a teacher's classroom as a neutral observer and try to give an account of her reality' (p. 20). In the same vein, I did not enter each of the teacher's classrooms as a value free observer and when it came time to write an account of each teacher at work, I was not value free. My experience as an undergraduate and postgraduate student had influenced the way that I viewed all things educational. The views of Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) were adopted in this regard when they suggest that 'rather than engaging in futile attempts to eliminate the effects of the researcher, we should set about understanding them' (p. 17).

There are a number of measures that can be used to enhance the likelihood of producing findings and interpretations that are credible. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that prolonged engagement (being in the field long enough to learn the culture, guard against misinformation being recorded and building trust); persistent observations (spending long enough in the field so that one is able to identify those aspects that are central to the aim of the research);and triangulation and member checking (which are discussed further in this section) are useful techniques to enhance the credibility of research.

Prolonged engagement was an important aspect, not only in terms of enhancing the credibility of the study, but also in terms of gaining a sufficient understanding of the work of kindergarten teachers to capture their day in an authentic manner. I spent long periods of time in the field and recorded approximately 50 hours of observation at each of the four research sites. The time spent at each of the sites allowed me to

develop the necessary relationships to gather the required data but also to determine which aspects were important in understanding kindergarten teachers' work.

3.8.2 Triangulation

The use of triangulation in qualitative studies is widely recognised. Triangulation, as the term implies, involves getting a purchase on the field of study by looking at it from a number of vantage points (Edwards, 2001, p. 124). Prolonged engagement at each research site and the observations that were conducted provided the opportunity for informed discussions to take place between the teachers and myself. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) recognise the importance of observations in this regard, suggesting that '...observation enables the researcher to verify that individuals are doing what they or the researcher think they are doing' (p. 110). In this study, methodoloigcal triangulation (the use of observations and interviews) and Data Triangulation (the four kindergarten teachers as sources of data) were utilised (Janesick, 2000).

3.8.3 Member Checking

Member checking represented an important aspect of the research process. The importance of member checking is recognised by Walsh et al (1993) who suggest, 'it is hard to get the story right unless one has the informed and patient cooperation of the people who know the setting' (p. 472). It was not so much a matter of getting it "right", but rather providing an account of each teacher's experience that accurately reflected "reality", or at least an approximation of reality (Orum et al, 1991).

I adopted the process of member checking outlined by Stake (1995). Member checking involved the participants being 'requested to examine rough drafts of writing where the actions or words of the actor are featured. The actor is asked to review the material for accuracy and palatability' (Stake, 1995, p. 115). Member checking was utilised at two levels; the transcript and the evolving story. I provided the teachers with a copy of their chapter at key intervals during the writing process. Stake (1995) has used member checking extensively and suggests that he would 'typically get little back from the actor – not very satisfying but entirely necessary' (p. 116). I had a similar experience to Stake, as these teachers did not make

suggestions for modifications to be made. However, this lack of suggestions for modifications suggest agreement with my accounts.

While using member checking, Maykut and Morehouse (1994) found that 'people are surprised at how much or how succinctly their experiences have been described' (p. 147). I found the teachers reacted in a similar manner. In addition, the use of member checking served to elicit a sense of reflection on the part of the teachers. At the end of the data collection phase of the study, one of the teachers had moved from teaching kindergarten to teaching prep. On reading the portrait of her at work, she told me that it made her sad. She missed kindergarten and my account had re-created for her, her work in kindergarten.

Another teacher, after having read her portrait, commented that she didn't realise that she had said certain things, but then added she could hear herself saying them as she read the text. Finally, one of the other teachers told me that she had no idea that her day was so busy and that it was little wonder she was exhausted when she went to bed. While member checking did not result in formal additions or amendments to the texts, it did provide a way of confirming the analysis of the observations conducted at each of the four research sites (Aubrey et al, 2000).

3.8.4 Transferability

Generalisability or external validity is associated with 'the ability to generalise findings from a specific setting and small group to a broad range of settings and people' (Neuman, 1997, p. 145). In this study, the term "transferability" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) has been applied instead of generalisability or external validity.

In order to claim that results are generalisable in quantitative studies, it is necessary to have drawn a sample that is representative of the larger population (Harrison, 2001). This was also recognised by Donmoyer (1990) who has suggested that external validity has tended to be 'associated with notions of random selection and statistical significance' (p. 176). In this regard, it is little wonder that there are difficulties associated with its use in qualitative research. Qualitative research rarely, if ever, applies the use of probability sampling techniques.

It is not possible for the qualitative researcher to 'specify the external validity of an inquiry, he or she can provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). Transferability in this sense, is more dependant upon the similarities that exist between the initial research site and the site to which the results or findings are intended to be transferred, than it is to the representativeness of the sample. Through thick description of the site and the events that take place within it, readers are able to determine whether transferability is possible to their situation. Although this viewpoint may represent a satisfactory alternative to generalisability at a theoretical level, it may be insufficient at a practical level. Walford (2001) argues that in order to 'be able to judge whether a particular finding from an ethnographic study in one school is appropriate in another, it is actually necessary to know as much about the second school as the first' (p. 15). The use of multiple cases and the intimate knowledge that the reader has of their own experiences may alleviate the difficulties discussed by Walford.

3.8.5 Dependability

The term dependability is used in place of reliability, which can be 'interpreted as the ability to replicate the original study using the same research instrument and to get the same results' (Orum et al, 1991, p. 17). Wolcott (1995) suggests research may not 'need to address reliability at all except to make sure that our audiences understand why it is not an appropriate measure for evaluating field work' (p. 168). Further:

> field workers as strongly committed to the art of fieldwork might instead be content to remind a reader that their stay in the field was long but never long enough. They would be less insistent about their ability to differentiate between what is valid and what it not, holding instead that whatever information they provide offers illustration but in no way constitutes proof (Wolcott, 1995, pp. 169 – 170).

When the term dependability is adopted, it may not be necessary to point specifically to the ways in which the study has achieved dependability as a separate entity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that it may be 'possible using the techniques outlined in relation to credibility to show that a study has that quality, it ought not be necessary to demonstrate dependability separately' (pp. 316 – 317). In light of this,

member checking and triangulation as well as an appropriate length of time in the field are deemed to have enhanced the dependability of the study's results.

3.9 Transformation of the Data

Transformation, in line with Wolcott's (1994) usage of the term, refers to three main ways in which qualitative researchers can "do something" with their data; description, analysis and interpretation. It is important to note that in qualitative research each of the categories are not independent. Rather, the boundaries between each category are blurred. The point at which description becomes analysis and analysis become interpretation are not clear. However, as Wolcott (1994) argues, it is a worthwhile exercise to address each separately. In this section, description, analysis and interpretation are examined in turn.

There are a number of choices available to the qualitative researcher through which s/he is able to transform the data although the 'nature of the study, the focus of the research questions and the curiosities of the researcher pretty well determine what analytic strategies should be followed' (Stake, 1995, p. 77).

The transformation of data began from the first tentative moments in the field and continued through to the "write-up" of the research. The ongoing nature of this process is widely recognised. For example, Stake (1995) asserts that 'there is no particular moment when data analysis begins. Analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations' (p. 71). The ongoing nature of data transformation is also recognised by Coffey and Atkinson (1996) who state that 'analysis is not a separate task, and it is certainly not a self-contained phase of research' (p. 192). Transformation of this nature is referred to by Woods (1986) as "speculative analysis" which is concerned with 'tentative reflection, perhaps revealing major insights, that is done throughout data collection' (Woods, 1986, p. 121). This type of speculative analysis was undertaken throughout the data collection process and involved each new piece of data being considered on its own merits in terms of what it offered the study, but also in combination with data that had already been generated.

The time in the field resulted in extensive amounts of diverse data being generated. Therefore the first step in transforming the data was an archival one, the like of which is recognised by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) who suggest that 'before coming to the question of what to do with all the field texts, we need to know what there is. At one level, this is an archival task' (p. 131). At another level the transcription, sorting and management of data represents a preliminary stage in the transformation of the data. Following this, it was important to familiarise myself with the data that had been generated. This was achieved through 'a careful reading (indeed probably several readings) of the corpus of data, in order to become thoroughly familiar with it' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 210).

To manage the extensive volume of data generated, data reduction strategies were employed. Miles and Huberman (1994) consider data reduction as being a 'process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data that appear written up in fieldnotes or transcriptions' (p. 10). To achieve data reduction in this study, a rudimentary form of coding was utilised. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) suggest that 'in practice, coding usually is a mixture of data reduction and data complication. Coding generally is used to break up and segment the data into simpler, general categories and is used to expand and tease out the data, in order to formulate new questions and levels of interpretation' (p. 30). This process was not a distinct stage; instead the process of reducing the data was ongoing in a similar manner to the transformation of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The application of the methods and techniques in this study resulted in two forms of text based data being generated, the observational data in the form of fieldnotes and the transcriptions of the interviews. The processes through which both these forms of data were transformed are presented in section 3.12 of this chapter.

3.9.1 Description

In qualitative research, especially that utilising ethnographic and case study approaches to research, the story is told using as much detail as possible (Wolcott, 1994). Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that the researcher's task is 'to gather the data and present them in such a manner that "the informant's speak for themselves"

(p. 21). In writing the account the goal is to 'stay as close as possible to the data as originally recorded' (Wolcott, 1994, p. 10).

In terms of developing description, writing represents an important stage in the process of transforming the data. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that by 'deciding what to leave in, what to highlight, what to report first and last, what to interconnect, and what main ideas are important, analytic choices are being made constantly' (p.8). This is illustrated by Stake (1995) who, drawing on the poetry of Ted Hughes, concludes that 'the page does not write itself, but by finding, for analysis, the right ambience, the right moment, by reading and rereading the accounts, by deep thinking, then understanding creeps forward and your page is printed' (p. 73). Further, Coffey and Atkinson (1996) assert that 'writing and representation cannot be divorced from analysis, therefore, and they should be thought of as analytic in their own right' (p. 193). The way in which the teachers' experiences are presented in the study is addressed in section 3.10 of this chapter.

3.9.2 Analysis

The term analysis conjures up images of a distinct stage in the research process through which the corpus of materials developed during the research process is subjected to a range of systematic procedures in order to make sense of them. In quantitative research, analysis is concerned with a distinct stage in which the data are somehow manipulated and then exposed to an array of statistical tests in order to gain a sense of meaning from them (Straus & Corbin, 1990). Analysis in a qualitative sense has been defined by Miles and Huberman (1994) as 'a continuous iterative enterprise' (p. 12), one that is not clearly bounded.

On the other hand, Coffey and Atkinson (1996) suggest that analysis in qualitative research is:

> not simply a matter of classifying, categorising, coding or collecting data. It is not simply a question of identifying forms of speech or regularities of action. Most fundamentally, analysis is about the representation or reconstruction of social phenomena (p. 108).

An alternative view of qualitative analysis is provided by Polkinghorne (1988) who believes the goal of analysis 'is to uncover the common themes or plots in the data. Analysis is carried out using hermeneutic techniques for noting underlying patterns ...' (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 177).

Analysis in Polkinghorne's view is concerned with looking beneath the surface of the words to interpret and reconstruct social phenomena. Aubrey et al (2000) add to this view of qualitative analysis, suggesting that 'the essential task here is for the ethnographer to begin to make sense of the diverse data collected' (p. 125).

Wolcott (1994) suggests 'the idea persists that categories should (will?) emerge from the data.' (p. 63). However, this is not always the case and as Wolcott (1994) points out, themes are imposed rather than found, discussed or uncovered. In light of Wolcott's advice, to tease out the themes and categories from the data, the idea of lenses advocated by Peshkin (2001) was adopted, in particular, themes and patterns. There were however times when no particular lens had been adopted. The themes and categories were established 'by carefully reading through transcripts, field notes and documents' (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 129). Peshkin (2001) suggests that when no intended lens has been selected 'we are just there, not focused on anything in particular; we are prepared for whatever may happen that catches our attention, ready to be surprised' (p. 250). However, it must be acknowledged that even though no particular lens has been selected, personal experience and consultation with the literature inevitably provide a lens through which the data are viewed.

In addition to use of lenses, 'the thematic questions...asked from the start of the investigation' (Kvale, 1996, p. 187) were utilised during the transformation of the data. In addition to the study's research questions, I also asked two secondary questions of the data. First, "What does this tell me?" and second, "what might it mean?" Woods (1986) believes that this represents an important step in transforming the data.

Finally, narrative analysis was employed in the study. However, it is important to note that narrative analysis was not applied in a formal sense through the application of numerous models that have been developed for this purpose (see Cortazzi, 2001).

Instead, narrative analysis was utilised in line with Kvale's (1996) view that 'during the analysis the researcher may alternate between being a "narrative finder" – looking for narratives contained in the interviews, and being a "narrative creator" – moulding the many different happenings into coherent stories' (p. 201).

Cortazzi (2001) argues that there has been an 'increasing recognition of the importance and usefulness of narrative analysis as an element of doing ethnography' (p. 384). The adoption of narrative analysis provided a number of additional advantages to the other analysis techniques utilised in the study.

Narrative enabled the study to 'portray the insider's view of what a particular job is "really" like' (Cortazzi, 2001, p. 386). The aim of the study was to gain an understanding of the nature of kindergarten teachers' work. The use of narrative analysis in terms of its ability to provide an insider's view of kindergarten teachers' work represents a significant advantage for the study. The adoption of narrative analysis was also responsive to meanings of experience, voice, human qualities on personal or professional dimensions, and research as a story (Cortazzi, 2001).

3.9.3 Interpretation

Interpretation as it has been applied in the study is defined by Wolcott (1994) as the point at which 'thinking and writing transcends the factual data and cautious analysis and begins to probe into what is to be made of them' (p. 36). To facilitate interpretation of the data, a number of measures were employed. Initially, Wolcott (1994) suggests that to arrive at interpretation one should 'keep on mulling the question you are asking, as well as mulling whether the questions you are asking are the important questions to ask' (p. 39). The notion of thinking about the questions and their relationship to the data is not revolutionary, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) also advocate using the data to think with. This view is extended by Coffey and Atkinson (1996) who suggest that 'data are not inert. They are not a fixed corpus of materials on which procedures of analysis are performed. We should be using data to think with and think about' (p. 191).

Interpretations of the data were also developed through consultation and review of the literature, a process which proved invaluable. This approach to devising interpretations is recognised by Wolcott (1994) who argues that through the application of literature it is possible to apply the data from case study research to larger issues.

3.10 Presentation of the Teachers' Experiences

The form in which each of the teacher's experiences is presented arose from a considerable amount of trial and error. This process also represented an important stage in the transformation of the data. The act of writing as a form of transforming data is widely recognised (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Wolcott, 1995, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The problematic nature of writing up qualitative research, and more specifically, research that has drawn on ethnography, has been highlighted by Woods (1986) who suggests that 'the point where rich data, careful analysis and lofty ideas meet the iron discipline of writing is one of the greatest problem areas of qualitative research' (p. 188).

The difficulties associated with writing up field based research are also recognised by Hammersley & Atkinson (1983) who suggest that 'one of the difficulties more commonly encountered in writing ethnographies is this: the re-ordering of one's data, and one's achieved competence as participant observer into a linear argument ... the everyday life under investigation is not itself organised in such a neat linear way' (p. 212). Another difficulty associated with writing accounts of fieldwork, is recognised by Edwards (2001) who states that:

> one of the challenges of telling the tale elicited from the field is to provide an account of what is going on with sufficient coherence to retain a reader's interest but also sensitive to the complexities and multiple perspectives revealed in the study (p. 133).

The difficulties that are associated with writing-up fieldwork are discussed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) in terms of a number of tensions. Two of the tensions they outlined were particularly pertinent in this study, namely, the way in which the

text that I produced would communicate with the reader and how I would represent the teachers and the stories that they shared with me.

The focus of the accounts, as one might expect, is on the individual experiences of the teachers. Edwards (2001) suggests that 'the extent to which the story is a richly illustrated research report, or is a personal narrative, will largely depend on whether the researcher's aim is primarily to produce illuminating research or to offer a critical interpretation' (p. 133). In light of this, I have aimed to produce reports that are richly illustrated in order to enhance the likelihood of illumination of kindergarten teachers' work.

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) recommended strategies of writing up ethnographic research that were incorporated into the presentation of each teacher's experience. Wherever possible, the words of the teachers were used because this provided a means to 'convey their particular – even unique – perspectives on the reported events and reflections' (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 113).

The quotes used in each teacher's account do not include page numbers; I did not want them to appear formal. Each account was constructed by 'manipulating the original words taken from individual interviews. Nearly all of the words were used in the original data' (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 125). I felt that this was an important consideration so that the accounts were approximations of each teacher's experience. I wanted the accounts to represent the teachers in a way that felt legitimate to them, but at the same time was authentic to outsiders (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). I wanted the teachers to see themselves, or at least part of their professional self in the account.

During the development of the account of each teacher's experience, the issue of representation became apparent. I did not find that it was a "crisis of representation" (Denzin, 1997), but I did need to find a balance in each of the stories where the teachers were represented in a professional light while at the same time capturing the unique qualities that make them who they are as teachers. This was made increasingly difficult because of ethical aspects associated with the study such as maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of the teachers. This was further

compounded by the small population from which the teachers were selected. The representation of the teachers was also an important consideration because as Van Maanen (1988) suggests 'ethnography irrevocably influences the interests and lives of the people represented in them – individually and collectively, for better or for worse' (p. 5). It was important to ensure that it was not the latter influence that the study would have on the lives of the teachers.

I provided the teachers with an opportunity to read the chapters at each stage of their development, beginning with the initial interview transcripts, the portrait of their day at work, and finally the chapters once the interview data had been incorporated. Issues of representation are also important because 'the researcher attempts to provide the clearest and most complete narrative of what went on in the field' (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 76). During this process, the issue of whether the teachers could be represented in this manner consumed considerable thought and energy. In addition, thoughts associated with what the teachers would say after having read the chapters, and more importantly, whether it was possible for someone else to recognise them were central in the writing process.

I had decisions to make while writing about the experiences of each teacher. I found myself in a similar position to that of Clough (1999) who points out that while trying to write of a participant, 'there was no method within the means of research that would allow me to evoke him for a reader without violating, through reduction, the nervous complex of meanings that meeting and working with him provoked' (p. 444).

As I read the quotes from each teacher, such is my familiarity with them, I hear their voices. It is extremely difficult to recreate this for the reader because as Wolcott (1994) recognises, the images in the mind of the reader 'are limited to the account you provide. They are unable to hear the nuances that you may hear; they were not present to hear them when originally spoken' (p. 15). I have endeavoured through the level of description of each teacher's experience to provide sufficient detail for the reader to re-create these teachers. The reader will not hear each teacher's voice as I do, but they will hear the voice of the teachers they have created.

Van Maanen (1988) suggests that 'different categories of readers will display systematic differences in their perceptions and interpretations of the same writing' (p. 25). One thing that is apparent from the portrait of each teacher is the absence of information related to how the teacher looks or the clothes they wear. Why? Because I want readers to re-create the teacher in their own minds. I have portrayed but part of a reality, the reader must create the rest. In this regard, the reader is an important part of the research and should therefore 'be counted on to do their share of the work' (Stake, 1995, p. 122).

The accounts also have a noticeable absence of interpretive comments. This is no accident. I have followed the views expounded by Zeller (1995) in which she suggests that the absence of such commentary 'gives the reader a chance to experience and respond directly to the statements and actions of the teachers and students and to draw his or her own conclusions about what had transpired' (p. 78).

In each of the four chapters in which the teachers' experiences are presented, thick description (Geertz, 1973) was utilised. In this sense 'a thick description is one that includes everything needed for the reader to understand what is happening' (Siraj-Blatchford & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001a, p. 195). The use of thick description was important because 'an ethnographic product is evaluated by the extent to which it recapitulates the cultural scene studied so that readers envision the same scene as was witnessed by the researcher' (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 2).

The views of Wolcott (1994) were also central to the development of each account, in particular the technique of "day-in-the-life". The advantage of this technique is associated with its ability to transport the 'reader immediately to the scene of the action...readers may be privy to a real or fictionalised account, an entire day, or some customary sequence of events' (p. 19). In this study, the portrait of each teacher was based on his/her description of a typical day in his/her life as a kindergarten teacher obtained during the second interview. The high level of congruence between the teachers' description of their day and the observational data that had been generated provided a broad framework, that is, the observational data were used to piece together a re-creation of each teacher's work day. In light of this technique being applied, the temporal order of some events was manipulated, in that one day is

made up of fragments of many days. The likelihood of the events occurring was established by me as the researcher as well as the teacher's perceptions of the events obtained through the member checking procedures, as outlined previously in this chapter.

3.11 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has presented:

- A detailed account of the methodology employed in the study.
- An examination of the role of observations and interviews in the generation of data.
- A discussion of issues associated with trustworthiness.
- The process through which the data were transformed.
- How the experience of each teacher was presented in the study.

In the following four chapters, the experiences of Anastasia, Sarah, Lucy and Sam are presented. It is important to note that the Tasmanian kindergarten teaching community in the northern region is a small and close knit community. In order to maintain the anonymity of participants, summarised biographical information and detailed descriptions of the kindergarten workplace have not been included at the beginning of each narrative case study.

Chapter Four - Anastasia

I really do think that kindergarten teachers are privileged to be kindergarten teachers. You have these wonderful little, innocent, trusting children in your care and to be able to be with them. It's a mother substitute. The parents hand over their child to you. Often it's the mums in tears, as they leave on the first day, not the children. The trust that the parents have in you, I suppose the professionalism too, that they would expect me to have, that I wouldn't be talking about their child to anyone else, that sort of thing. So yes, I do see it as a privilege.

It is 7:45. I wanted to arrive before Anastasia and I am surprised to see that she is already here. I enter the staffroom and find her updating the information on the whiteboard. Working in the kindergarten reduces the level of contact that Anastasia has with other school personnel.

We keep different hours entirely. I don't get to see the other members of staff, only at the staff meeting. Usually, I walk in late because of bus duties on those days, and the only other time I get to see them is on a Friday recess and lunchtime. That is if parent-child finishes early enough and everything is tidied up and then I get to see them on a Friday recess.

The lack of contact makes it difficult for Anastasia to keep abreast of things that are happening in the rest of the school.

You might not even know that there has been a special visitor at the school. It is hard keeping track of things. It's like on grade 2 / 3, they had some human movement students and my intern said, how long are they here for. I didn't even know that they were here. I went over and spoke to them and they had been here all year, all year, every Friday. I didn't know.

This, in part, is one of the reasons that Anastasia likes to write the daily notices on the board. While Anastasia adds to the list of notices, she talks to another teacher who stands beside her. "Anything happening today?" she asks a third teacher who has entered the staffroom.

"They put a lot of time into that computer night, last night" Anastasia comments to one of the other teachers. The teacher nods in agreement. "Is she crabby or just shy?" she asks Anastasia, as the third teacher leaves the staffroom without talking to anyone.

Anastasia does not answer; instead, she shrugs her shoulders and then glances in my direction. I am writing in my notebook, it was obvious that I had recorded most of the conversation. "Thirty nine new Kinders next year. I've interviewed them all, all of them are interested in coming", Anastasia comments to me. There is a large pile of papers on the desk in front of me. I assume that this is what she was talking about.

"Is there anything else to go on the board?"
The other teachers in the staffroom do not answer Anastasia directly, although one teacher does comment that there is never a spare minute at the school.

The principal has entered the staffroom and joins another teacher who is standing in front of the whiteboard. The principal, the other teacher and Anastasia talk about an incident that occurred yesterday. "We need to keep this a bit quiet" the principal comments to another teacher who has joined the conversation. The teacher had some additional information about the incident and relays this to the principal. I am included in the conversation; maybe that way they can ensure that I am not recording too much of what is being said.

Anastasia begins a conversation with a specialist teacher who will be working with the class later in the day. I am not entirely sure about the content of the conversation although from what I hear it is about the appropriateness of the work that the teacher has planned.
"It's a while since I have been in a kindergarten".

"Who do I have to watch?" the specialist teacher asks Anastasia. She comments on a number of children counting them off on her fingers as she goes. Anastasia outlines the background of several of the children and provides certain tactics that can be used to bring them around should they start to behave in an inappropriate manner. "He doesn't like to be singled out. That would be the main three, but there's a few others. That's all, the rest are beautiful".

"They have no electricity at the house" Anastasia comments to one of the other teachers. The children's backgrounds are discussed and abuse is mentioned. I tune out, thinking instead about what it must be like for some of these children to live in situations that I cannot begin to imagine.

"Are we right then?" I am suddenly aware that Anastasia has gathered up her belongings from one of the long tables that run down the centre of the staffroom. She is already heading for the door. Anastasia stops to talk to the groundsman who is putting up an Australian and an Aboriginal flag. I wonder why we have walked around the outside of the building instead of along the corridor as we have done on other occasions, albeit later in the day.

As we walk along the path toward the kindergarten building, I begin to think about a conversation that I had with Anastasia. I was, and still am, interested in why Anastasia had wanted to become a teacher and more specifically, a kindergarten teacher. Anastasia described her journey into the realms of kindergarten teaching as a long one citing a love of children as the main reason for entering the teaching profession.

My whole family have been involved in education, you know, even going back generations there's sort of been a little teacher floating through. But I think that it was my love of children. I just wanted to make a difference, to the children. I wanted to be a good influence in their lives.

Two children are waiting around the corner of the main school building. They greet Anastasia, smile at me and accompany us to the kindergarten. Anastasia stops to talk to another group of girls, "Is your sister starting kinder next year?" We have arrived at the classroom and find Ellie and Susan waiting at the door.
"You know where the royal bags go?" Anastasia asks the boys who had carried her bags down to the classroom for her.
"Yes"
The boys place the "royal bags" in the storeroom. "The grade fours and fives should come down to play with the Kinders!" one of the boys comments to Anastasia. Anastasia considers this for several seconds and then smiles.

Another parent has arrived, "Would you like a coffee?" Anastasia asks.

"It's alright, I'll get it".

The parent makes her way to the small kitchen that is situated at one end of the kindergarten classroom, just inside the front door. She returns with a coffee for Anastasia. The parent is here for parent help and will spend the morning session working with the children. Lorraine, Anastasia's assistant, does not work in the kindergarten full time and for that reason parent help has become increasingly important in the kindergarten. Anastasia had told me that she was very grateful to the parents at Progress Primary School.

I have never known such wonderful parent help as we have here in kinder. This year I was minus a full time aide and they, four to five of them, have just stepped in so beautifully. They come every afternoon and help with the children, without fail, religiously every Monday or Tuesday or whatever it might be. And I think that's helped build a relationship with those parents too.

Lorraine has arrived and after saying hello to several of the children, begins to fill some of the pots with paint.

Four parents have taken up their usual morning position at the back of the classroom. Anastasia had greeted each of them as they arrived. The boys who had carried Anastasia's bags to the classroom leave after having eaten some biscuits that Anastasia had given them. Anastasia pauses from setting up the morning's activities to greet each of the parents and children as they enter the classroom. This time provides her with a good opportunity to catch up with parents. The conversations are generally short and range from what the parents have been doing and to anything they consider important for Anastasia to know about their children. The conversations and interactions Anastasia has with the parents has not always been this brief. At other schools Anastasia has also offered parent information sessions about a range of topics.

What I haven't done here at all with the parents, which I feel that I should, is help them with little sessions like, how to read to your child, what to do when you're playing or setting the table. I haven't done any educating of the parents. I know that they have a lot of sessions over at the community health centre, but I don't know how many would attend that. Yeah, (pause) I think that my role is to help the parents in that way and that's a great downfall that I haven't (pause), or is it time. Night time, you know that they'd be at home. Friday morning parent child, Friday afternoon grade four, perhaps one day (laughs). I do prepare a little booklet, and that's sent home with the new parents. I give it to the new parents when they come in at the end of each year, ready for next year.

Anastasia asks Ellie and Susan who have been following her around the room since she arrived if they would like to help her open some of the curtains in the room. They agree and decide that they will work together opening the curtains. Natural light spills in across the room; the lights in the classroom are rarely used. This is the legacy of an experience that Anastasia had in another school that has influenced her as a kindergarten teacher.

I suppose everything that I have undergone would have an influence on me as a kindergarten teacher but one experience that I use a lot of in here is I had a term at a Steiner school while I was relief teaching. I had been offered the full time position which I took and I was going to stay for years and years and years, like I had in all of the other schools, but no I couldn't handle it.

While Anastasia did not stay at the school, she did take several things away from the experience.

Some of the beautiful philosophies that they have in the Steiner, I've carried over here into the kindergarten, like using a lot of natural things, the use of colour, soft colour, the natural lighting - I try not to have on the fluorescent lights. Making the children more aware of nature - the use of candles, it's nice.

Cameron has injured his hand and his mother, after playing some games with him, provides some information to Anastasia about the state of the injury. "I think he will be alright. He's just got to be careful that he doesn't open it up again".
Cameron's hand is bandaged. He has a large cut that runs down the centre of his palm the sight of which sends a tingle down my spine.
"You were just in too much of a hurry weren't you?" Anastasia comments to him as he wraps the bandage around his hand. Cameron smiles and then starts perusing the puzzles, settles on one and then begins to complete it with the help of his mother.

Glen has arrived; his mother arrives several minutes later. On the way to hang up his bag, he pauses, takes out his drink bottle and consumes about one third of the green contents. He is puffing heavily. His mother tells Anastasia that he has run all the way to the kindergarten from the start of the school grounds. "Research is showing that those drink bottles are bad for the children's teeth. They are making more children's teeth bucked. They also suck the drink and it goes in between their teeth". (The bottle

is the type that has a lift up lid that the children suck the drink through). Anastasia relays this to the Glen's mother as well as another parent who has joined them.

More children and parents arrive and the children, once they have placed their bags on the hook in the back corner of the room, walk around looking at the various activities that have been set up. Today the activities include free play, that is, home corner with dress-ups, a range of puzzles that are set up on the table and a number of larger "floor" puzzles, computer based activities, and something that the children refer to as hammering. Hammering involves the children using small tack hammers to nail small wooden shapes to cork board to create patterns or pictures.

Anastasia finishes organising the puzzles and games and moves over to the whiteboard that is situated in one corner of the room and begins to organise the days of the week and the cards that show what the weather is like for that day. Anastasia has noticed that one of the stars that denotes who is in the computer group for the session is missing. "Someone must have taken it home with them last week. You know what might have been better?"
I look in Anastasia's direction.
"It might have been better if we had made the bigger stars - we might have been able to see them before the children take them home".

Anastasia begins talking to me about birds although I am not sure how or why this conversation started. She remembers that she has not fed the fish for a while. As she feeds the fish, Anastasia asks if I could take a group to cut some pumpkins so that they will be able to make some soup tomorrow. I agree. The pumpkins are from the school garden although they appear not to have ripened properly. As I examine the pumpkins to be used, Anastasia comments "They are not as ripe as they could have been, vandals picked them before they were ready. They just left them lying on the grass".

I look out the window and notice a large garden that runs along the length of the prep classroom. The wall forms one of the boundaries to the kindergarten yard. There are a number of different plants and vegetables growing in the garden. The opportunity of being able to have a garden in the kindergarten classroom is an example that

Anastasia cites in terms of the freedom that teaching in a kindergarten environment offers.

When we're outside during outdoor play, if we want to go and plant a little garden we've got time to do it. We get out our implements and we can go and do weeding or watering or helping a lot of the children in this area. I've been to all their homes - not many of them - not many at all out of the 32 would have a nice garden, or their surrounds or anything are aesthetically pleasing. They take great delight in planting their little plants and picking their flowers. I think it helps bring this gentleness into them, to make them to appreciate nature more. Just to see a little mushroom or toadstool growing, they are just fascinated to see all that springing up. Which is a thing that you don't get in primary grades, that time to be a child.

Rows of black plastic pots sit against the back of the room, next to the large window that runs almost the entire length of the classroom. It looks as though beans are growing, perhaps the next addition to the kindergarten garden. Alvin rocks on a wooden rocking horse that has galloped some miles in its time. The feet of the horse squeak rhythmically over the sound of the heaters. Miles is crying. Anastasia moves to comfort him although he continues sobbing. Lorraine is helping several of the children organise their library books while their parents look on.

The clock approaches nine o'clock and Anastasia rings a small bell that sits on the shelf that runs along the bottom of the small whiteboard. The children are slow to move over and sit down on the mat. Anastasia walks around the room subtly hurrying those children who have already taken considerably longer than the rest of the class.

The class finally assemble in front of Anastasia's chair as she reaches down and takes out an alphabet book from beside her chair.
"Who can remember where we got up to?"
There are no suggestions put forward and after several minutes of discussion of the letters they have already talked about, the correct page is found. The children sing through the book making the letter sounds and reciting a number of words that start with the letter.
"H, that's in my sister's name" Jess calls out. Several other children start to call out when they recognise a letter from their name or the name of someone they know.

Yesterday, the children had been looking at eggs and this is also the topic of conversation this morning. Anastasia asks the class a range of questions.

"How many eggs are there here?"
"Lots" Alison.
Anastasia smiles. "Let's count them together".
The children count out loud as Anastasia points to each of the eggs. Several of the children rush ahead confusing others. "We need to count as I point to each of them."
They begin counting again, this time everyone counts together.
Anastasia then moves the eggs around on the board to create a variety of patterns and the children are asked about the pattern that has been made and the different patterns that could be made.

This continues for several minutes and then the topic of conversation shifts to the days of the week.
"What day is it today?"
"Saturday".
"Do we come to school on the weekend?"
The child shakes her head and laughs, this sets the rest of the class off and they all laugh.
"Thursday".
"That's close, today is Tuesday. What sort of day is it today?"
"Tuesday", Glen yells "that means it's my day on the computer" from the back of the group.
The children direct their attention to the weather. Most of the children look out the window closest to them although several of the children look to the back of the room.

The sound of a lawn mower comes and goes, on each pass of the kindergarten yard. I am surprised to learn that the person mowing the lawn is the father of one of the children in the class. "I'm on holidays and I would just be sitting around bored at home, so I thought that I'd come in here and do a few things."

Blake has an obvious speech impediment and he is asked to go with the speech pathologist. Zach asks where Blake is going and what he is doing.
"Blake is seeing a teacher to help him to say some of his words properly". Some of the children ask if they are able to have a turn.
"No not everyone gets to see Vicki." (Speech Pathologist)

Anastasia begins to explain to the children the activities that are available for the morning, but not long into the explanation she is interrupted.
"What about the day song?"
"Oh, thank you for reminding me darling."
The children begin to sing a song about the days of the week. It reminds me of an item that a class would perform at an assembly, and it is a very polished performance.

With the song complete Anastasia returns to explaining the activities for the morning. "When you get your sheet you need to carefully cut out the egg. What will you do then?"
"Write our name on it"
"Yes, then you can decorate your eggs, remember the little talk that we had about how eggs are decorated."
"Yes" the class chorus. Anastasia finishes explaining the other activities and the children are then dismissed to choose the activity that they would like to complete.

The children engage in a range of additional activities to those on offer when they arrived at the beginning of the session. The activities include: play dough; painting; put together (a motor bike that can be taken apart and as the name suggests put back together using plastic screws and a plastic screw driver); an activity in which the children have to cut out the required number of leaves and then paste them in the appropriate section of a sheet that has been cut into the shape of a leaf and puzzles / games; and, an activity in which the children are making butterflies out of toilet rolls.

I asked Anastasia about the planning that she did. I was not surprised by her response considering the length of time that she had been teaching.

Minimal, is that the word? - I believe, and have never done it all my life. I tell even my student teachers, why spend hours sitting at a computer drawing little boxes, writing in all these things when you come to school, there's vomit on the floor and you can't get to it and do it. I would far rather be there thinking, how am I going to pose that question, what will I say when this child is exhibiting this type of behaviour. The time spent writing down on the computer; I could be physically making a beautiful game. I like to see more practical work done, than all of this beautiful planning. The hours you know, ok it looks good, but then that person doesn't have the little mystery pictures because she has been too busy writing it up on the computer.

"What do we do when we are coughing?" Harry places his hand over his mouth "That's right you remembered".

"Can you get him to count something, even if it is the number of things that he has made", Anastasia asks the parent who is in the classroom for parent help. Interrupting Mark from what he is doing the parent encourages him to count some of the things that he has made. Mark appears rather nonchalant about counting anything, instead he keeps his attention focused on the sculpture that he is completing.

Miles, who has been crying since the beginning of the session continues to cry, although his crying has grown louder. Anastasia indicates that Lorraine should go and see if he is all right, although her presence does nothing to stem the flow of tears that roll across his red checks.

The children are always engaged in a range of activities, I wonder where Anastasia gets all of her ideas from – professional development? I thought that this was a viable solution, although it did nothing more than demonstrate my ignorance of working with kindergarten children on a daily basis,.

I find that I don't like leaving my kinders. Now years ago when you were on a two or three or something, you didn't mind going off to a little bit of PD or whatever. But oh, I don't like to go off and do PD. There are the strong bonds, you have those children all day for a whole year and they do become your children. You are part of that child's life and a big part of it. And with our children here, perhaps the only stable part of their lives. You just can't say a relief teacher is coming in tomorrow I won't be here, you need to prepare them.

While it is difficult for Anastasia to attend professional development, she still receives considerable support and professional development.

We have a Kindergarten Teachers Association and we meet regularly, about once every six weeks and we have a bit of professional development. We have a time to talk to one another, a bit of professional development and a sharing time.

"Would you like to see what the completed Humpty Dumpty looks like?"
There is one piece missing. "Who can tell me what part is missing?"
Several of the children call out although Anastasia selects Lola who has her hand up.
"It's his eye."

"That's right, who can tell me what eye is missing, is it his left or right?"
"The right one."

Miles is still crying although more uncontrollably now. "Mummy, mummy, I want my mummy". Miles has isolated himself from the rest of the class and is standing by the window. Alvin has moved over to him to see what is wrong. Miles turns to face the opposite direction. One of the other parents in the room attempts to comfort the child. Miles says that he is standing next to the window so that he can see his mum when she walks back past. A second parent also moves over to help comfort him and is quickly joined by Anastasia. Anastasia places her hand on Miles' shoulder and guides him toward the painting area.

Lorraine who has been outside to finish setting up the rest of the outdoor play equipment has returned to the butterfly making activity. I watch as Anastasia and Lorraine work together at the butterfly activity, sharing knowing glances at various comments the children make to one another, and to them. Working with another adult in the classroom, in the form of a teacher's assistant, was something that Anastasia was not accustomed to before teaching in kindergarten.

I'd had twenty-seven, twenty-eight years by myself in a classroom. In the catholic system you just never had aides. Up until the last couple of years when they began to give you someone for half an hour a week. I must say that you used them for putting up a display or Photostatting or cleaning or something - you never actually used them to work with the children. So when I came here and saw this other adult and teacher's aide in the classroom - I just, for the first two terms, I was doing all the cleaning. I was putting the paint brushes away. I just couldn't get used to delegating what I felt were my responsibilities to her.

Lorraine, Anastasia's assistant had only worked on a kindergarten for one term before she came to work with Anastasia. Initially, Anastasia perceived Lorraine's role as cleaning up, doing up shoelaces and that sort of thing. This soon changed, and over time Anastasia found working with Lorraine very productive.

She has just become my right hand and we often plan together and sit down and talk about children because she sees things from a different angle. Sometimes she sees the beginning of something or she'll see the tail end or whatever, or I'll see the tail end and she sees the beginning. So, that is such valuable help. So I'm using her more and more to work with the children.

Anastasia with the phone book resting on her knee is attempting to find Miles' telephone number. This proves unsuccessful. Anastasia calls the office in an attempt to get the number.

Miles believes that his mother will be up at the office. Anastasia offers to take him up to the office to have a look for his mother. "Can I come?" Harry, a small boy with short blonde hair, asks if he can accompany them to the office. Anastasia asks Miles "Would you like a friend to come or do you want it just to be you and me?"
He considers this for a moment and decides that he only wants Anastasia to take him. Harry looks disappointed although he resumes playing the game within seconds.

Lorraine is now working with another small group of children completing the butterflies. Four children are playing the "Humpty Dumpty" game and they start to sing the song. "That's not it". Emily who is working at the table has decided that the words are not correct. "I know the words you know," protests Harry who is also playing the game. They do not seem to notice my presence. Anastasia arrives at the table and praises them for playing the game so well and the children raise the issue of the words for the song. Both Harry and Emily put their arguments forward. Anastasia does not enter the debate.
"I am sure that you all know the words to the song. There are lots of different ways to sing it".

Molly arrives unaccompanied; she is late and stands at a vacant table fidgeting with the pocket of her track pants. She begins to push a small piece of play dough around the table looking around the room as she does so. It appears that I am the only one to notice that Molly has arrived.

"Come on Miles, we will try ringing once more, if she's not there then you can stand by the window". Anastasia comments as she has exhausted all options of contacting his mother.
"Would you like to do some painting?" Molly shyly agrees and then moves over to put on a smock.

Anastasia is cutting some more paper, while Lorraine works with yet another group of children at the butterfly activity. Miles is helping Anastasia carry some paper from "Aladdin's Cave" to the table. He has now stopped crying although he still appears to be upset. He engages, although reluctantly, in the activity.

"I was just watching the child holding her pencil over there". I change my position so that I am able to see the child that Anastasia is talking about. Ellie has the pencil grasped in her fist, tight enough for the knuckles to go white. This was not the first time that Anastasia and I had spoken about pencil grips.

When I was first training and I hadn't had much to do with children. I used to get so irate with these children who didn't hold their pencil the correct way. I've always maintained that if they were shown the correct pencil hold to begin with they would continue. So along came my first child and low and behold I proved my theory correct. When she went to grab the pencil I popped it in her hand and showed her how to hold it. She had a beautiful grip and that just confirmed it. However, there's always a however, the second child came along and she grabbed the pencil and I said "oh no darling you hold it like this".
"NO!" she said and grabbed it back off me and made a little fist around it. (Laughs) Still to this day she has a bad pencil hold.

Molly has finished her painting activity and smiles broadly at me as she rides the wooden rocking horse that is at the edge of the wet area. Miles begins crying again and moves to stand by the window and then moves to stand behind Anastasia who is working with a group of children at the computer.

Anastasia is working with Susan at the number activity. She then calls Brad to come and work at the activity with her. He comes over but does not sit down; it appears that he does not want to do the activity. "Make yourself comfortable, sit down." Brad reluctantly sits down. "What are you going to do now in this leaf?"
"Put them in there" Brad comments as he points to a number of small paper leaves.
"You are very good at sticking those small leaves inside the big leaves."

"It's computer today."
"Yes it is, go over there and wait until it is your turn". Anastasia directs Glen who is wearing a computer star over to wait for his turn. When he arrives at the computer, he begins to provide the children with instructions about what they have to do until he notices that they do not have computer stars on. "It's not your turn, you don't

have the stars". The other children then move off to complete other activities. Anastasia makes her way over to the computer watching Glen as he works.

"It is just so rewarding", Anastasia comments to me as I stand next to her at the computer.

You know you hear teachers say this "Oh it's so rewarding and you can see the benefits that the children get blah, blah, blah". But honestly, you can really see it here, you can really measure it so well. They come to school - they've just come from out of their garden, wild and woolly, no shoes on and all of that. And to see the progress - It's a great thrill each stage, each little milestone that they achieve, it's a celebration. I was just doing a little bit of this testing on computers yesterday. When they came to school, only about two out of the thirty odd were able to - knew anything about computers because they're just not in the homes. And, yesterday I went through quite a few. They are now selecting pictures - they can enlarge them, and they know how to animate them. They were clicking and dragging, deleting, using a text box, writing their name from memory. See, they couldn't do any of this at the beginning of the year, and it's just wonderful - just wonderful to be part of - of that growth and development.

These are not the only aspects of teaching in Kindergarten that Anastasia find rewarding.

I love the trust that the children put in their teacher. It's always marvelled me that they are just so trusting, that they are going to come to school and learn and know they will be safe. They look up to you so much - yeah - it's just so rewarding, that you're not going to hurt them or put them on the wrong track, especially when you do hear of some examples of what happens to children at this age - all done by adults too.

The "ball buddies" arrive and the children move outside. Anastasia was not sure whether the "ball buddies" were coming today. When they arrive she changes her plans to accommodate them. "This is good because the children can practice their catching and throwing" Anastasia comments to me as she organises the children and moves them outside to the kindergarten yard. The kindergarten playground is separate from the main school building, joined only by the yard, which incorporates the back of one of the prep buildings and a covered walkway. This may be one of the reasons that teachers in kindergarten classrooms are sometimes overlooked when plans are being made regarding the whole school. Perhaps it is a case of out of sight out or mind.

Kinder is regarded as separate. When the rest of the staff were developing the literacy document, they had means of testing for prep, one, two up to six, but

underneath kindergarten there was just this big blank. I said well look you know I can do testing –of print awareness. I just tick, front of the book, back of the book, what part tells you the story is it the picture or pointing to the text, you know which way does the text run. So that was good. I just happened to briefly see the other night a teacher was walking past with the beginning of our maths curriculum, and the same thing - kinder (pause) nothing. The next one was prep - one to one correspondence, blah, blah, blah. Yet we do that here in kinder, our 1 to 1 and sequencing colours and all that. It can be documented and can be part of our school system. I find that there's a lot of pressure coming from higher up in the department for all this testing and KILO's and KINO's and answering literacy policies and mathematics policies. Just, when is there time for the play?

Or perhaps kindergarten is overlooked because other teachers have not had any first hand experience of what goes on in kindergarten? Anastasia had other ideas.

I think they think we play all the time. A lot of teachers are physically scared of little children. I had an AST 3 who would just shake the minute she came into the kinder room. She would sort of just stand there "can I see you outside" - little ankle biters or something. Yes, I think it's just not understanding the smaller child. I suppose it's like uni doesn't think much of high school, high doesn't think much of primary, you know. This is to me - the foundation.

Anastasia rounds up Cameron and Dale who have run to another part of the kinder grounds and are standing under a tree. "Please come and find your buddy so that you can join in." They run off and find their buddies. For the next fifteen minutes the children take part in a number of large and small ball activities with their buddies, from grade three and four.

The children farewell their buddies before moving back into the classroom. John lags behind the rest of the group.
"You can get your morning tea and sit down on the mat", Anastasia calls from just outside the door. Pausing next to John she asks
"What's wrong?"
"I hate you."
Anastasia looks at John who begins to cry. "That's a shame because I think that you are a lovely boy".

The demands of the other children necessitate that Anastasia does not dwell on her rather brief but intense conversation with John, as several children need things opened and they have formed a queue in front of her.

"Gary you should have had your healthy food first, not your chips." The child continues to eat his chips after first looking blankly at Anastasia.
"See, he just keeps on eating them anyway", Anastasia comments to me.

I later find out from a conversation with John that he was upset because he did not get to have a turn at the golf game and he had thought that he would not get another opportunity to have a turn.

Once the children have finished their morning tea, they are sent to get their hats. They line up at the door, and once everyone has found a position in the line they are allowed to move outside. Each of the children completes the circuit that has been set up; they are then provided with time for free play.

Anastasia walks around talking to each group of children as they play. There is a large group of children in the sandpit, while others play on the circuit equipment. The bikes and scooters also appear to be popular.

Anastasia, after looking at her watch, asks Will to go and get the packing up bells. He returns with the bells and rings them constantly.
The children begin packing up while Will continues to ring the bells. Anastasia signals for him to stop ringing the bells. "Thankyou, that will do now, you need help pack away some of these things". He rings them several more times before moving inside. The rest of the children neatly arrange the equipment and return to the classroom.

Collecting their bags the children gather on the mat for the final time today. Anastasia, collects several piles of work and announces that it is "Treasure time". She hands several pieces of work to each of the children. Most of the children hang on to the papers although several of them attempt to store them in their bags with varying levels of success. The children are dismissed after they have recognised their names.

Anastasia reorganises the room and then makes her way to the empty staffroom to eat her lunch. Forty five minutes elapse and it is time for Anastasia to return to the classroom and welcome the next group of children.

I arrive back in the classroom to find Anastasia talking to two parents about their child Eli. Anastasia is going through a copy of his report with them. More parents have arrived and they have brief conversations with Anastasia. The time that Anastasia is able to spend talking to parents is something that she values.

I love the time that you have in kinder to be with the parents as well and I see that as a vital year for these parents. Someone to listen to them, introduce them to the school culture, just to be that friend to them. A lot of them have had not very nice experiences themselves at school, or feel threatened in a way. Just - just being there for them.

Several of the parents do not come all the way inside the classroom; instead they hover around at the front of the classroom near the door. They appear reluctant to come in. Anastasia greets them and then asks several questions about what they have been doing. I have also noticed that some of the parents drop their children off at the door and do not even enter the classroom. I wonder what school must have been like for them?

A group of parents stand in the middle of the classroom talking about their children "one of mine is going through the terrible twos" and comments that if she had the choice she would rather have boys than girls. The topic of conversation focuses on the cost of school uniforms. I hear several parents talking about what I am doing at the school although I resist the temptation to look in their direction.

The children assemble at the door with their hats. A rocket that is the height of the door is stuck to the back of the door leading out into the kindergarten yard. The numbers one through ten are attached in a haphazard pattern, although sequentially, around the rocket.

It's been a challenge creator for me - they have to have their numbers. Trying to think of different ways to introduce the numbers one to ten in an exciting way.

The rocket is a prime example of one of many ways that the numbers, one through ten, are displayed around the classroom. A large poster is on the wall near Anastasia's chair. The number and then a corresponding number of objects have also been stuck along side it. The door is open and the children spill out into the kindergarten yard. "Remember that you have to do the circuit", Anastasia comments to the children before they have the opportunity to run off to all corners of the yard.

"Isn't it interesting that they call it the wheel chair bike?", referring to a bike that the children sit in and use their arms to power around.
Jackson and Mary argue about who should be riding one of the bikes. Anastasia intervenes "I promised it to Mary. I'm sure that if I had promised the bike to you then you would want me to keep my promise to you." Jackson appears to be satisfied with the explanation and hands the bike over. "After she has done four laps then you can have a turn." Jackson smiles and then works in the sandpit with a number of other children who are digging a large hole in the centre of the sandpit.

The playground was basically condemned when I got here. We levelled all of this area and then put in the pathways. It would not have happened if we had to pay for labour and everything - although some of the parents came and helped.

As Anastasia continued talking about the playground and what it was like when she arrived, I was instead thinking about how she became a teacher and ended up at Progress Primary School. This was something that was of particular interest to me during the interviews I conducted with Anastasia.

Anastasia has not always taught in a kindergarten classroom, or for that matter a government school. Going back further, Anastasia began her training at a Catholic Teachers Training College when she was 17 years of age. Anastasia described her training as basic but very rewarding.

I went of an evening to TAFE and did my education subjects; all day was spent in the classrooms. You went right from prep right through to grade six. Each day you would take a little bit of reading or some science or whatever. You were dealing with the children the whole time. You took duty. You took responsibility for the classroom, as in cleaning of, because we never had cleaners in those days. So it was always the student teacher's job to clean the classrooms. And any outside work of course we had to do. Yes it was full on the whole time.

In addition to the work that Anastasia was required to complete at the teachers college and in the classroom, she also had a number of other commitments.

You were encouraged to go to the parents and friends association meetings that they had, to participate in any of the extra sports days, or parades in the street or that sort of thing.

The classroom training that Anastasia completed was a combination of observation and practice.

We had to do 10 crit lessons and 10 practical lessons a year. Ah, crit lessons, or observations I should say. I'm going back 30 odd years, yes 10 crit lessons and you had to prepare the lesson, have all your documentation, what grade you were going to use – questioning. The teacher sat at the back of the room and you taught the lesson. The teacher wrote up everything from voice to dress, what you said and even critted you on your handwriting on the board. They would get you to write up some words and stuff. Then you had to observe 10 lessons, where the teacher would do everything and you would have to write down the aims or the objectives or the introduction, what the introduction was, the middle of the lesson (laughs) - yes. That was the time too when we had inspectors from the Education Department and they would come and inspect the school once a year and have a look at your book and that's about it.

However, after Anastasia had completed two years of her training, the rules regarding the length of training that was required were changed.

The Schools Board of Tasmania had changed the rules and it would mean doing five years training. So I had another three to go. However, they did class me as qualified at the end of two years and I then went full time on prep, which would be the same as it is today. And I stayed there then for six years. I left and had a year off and then I went back for another twelve months on prep again. I then had twelve months off, went to Memorandum College and had a composite one – two for three years.

After having completed her teacher training, Anastasia began to consider furthering her own education.

Back in the 70's I looked into uni and I just had to do so many units, oh it just seemed endless, and having two young children at home and teaching full time, I thought no I won't bother.

Instead Anastasia continued training through the Catholic Education System.

For which I was rewarded, because as I completed so many units, they would then class you as another year trained, so I was four year trained by that time, the time I left. However, coming into this system, I know I do need to up-grade, and that's what I've been doing all this year. I'll be wheeling my wheel chair across the stage to the Dean (laughs). I don't know how I will get up the Jubilee Hall steps by the time I finish. I must say - I'm enjoying what I've been doing at uni.

Anastasia had been teaching in an Independent school and began to miss the Catholic Education System.

I suppose that I was in an elitist school. I didn't like the attitude of the parents or the children. Like they were just so cocky, and they just lacked that compassion, or that quiet, inner something I just thought that I would like to get back into the Catholic system.

Anastasia returned to the Catholic education system and continued teaching there for the next seventeen years. Around the time when Pathways and the Whole Language approach to literacy came to the fore, Anastasia was introduced to the Tasmanian Reading Association.

I had great growth over this time in myself; I found it a very exciting time. I just went to as much professional development and conferences and meetings as I could about it.

Anastasia became known for her whole language approach and this was recognised by the Catholic Department of Education.

I was seconded for two years part time to help the other schools in the north, the independent as well as the Catholic schools. Each school would take on a ten week course, going through the reading and writing processes, and I would go in on their classes during the day, then after school for 2 hours I would have lectures on language, so that was great. A lot of preparation of course. I mean working with your peers - a bit different to children. I loved working with parents, did a lot of work with parents, yes.

During her time at Ridgley School, Anastasia taught a range of grades, which included, grade one, grade two and grade three.

I found that I was becoming a bit jaded at one stage and I was going to the cupboard and getting out the same materials, so I left. I actually resigned from teaching after about 25 years. And I always said that I would leave when I got to that stage.
So I left to fulfil a dream. It was an expensive dream, but it was just so wonderful because it was dealing with children again. I opened up my own business in town.

After a break of two and a half years operating a childcare centre, she returned to the Government School System, to Progress Primary School, as a relief teacher.

It wasn't such a cultural shock for me when I came to Progress Primary School as some teachers experience. I don't know why - I just accepted them. A lot of the teachers are terribly shocked when they come here, the language, the poverty, the hopelessness of lots of families. I don't know why - perhaps it might have been - I came from - I suppose I see myself as middle class, but we were a poor family. I had a father who, looking back now of course he was an alcoholic and a great gambler. I had a very strong mother and she supported the family. I think I just have that little parallel going with these families. Perhaps not as severe as some of these people but I've known what it was like to be a kid with mum saying "no I've got no money you can't have it, we've got to wait till pay day". Whereas a lot of these teachers are very - have come from very privileged families. I get angry. I get angry - can I say that?

I was surprised that Anastasia had asked my permission to talk about how she felt. This was the first time that I really became aware of my position and the power that came with it in the interview process; I was in a position to say no, to silence her. Of course I did not, I allowed her to continue because I wanted the rest of the story. I wanted to know what made her angry.

I get very angry when I hear other teachers downing the family. It's that perception of "us" that's out in the community.

This reaffirmed what I had already suspected from my time in Anastasia's classroom, that is, how closely Anastasia aligns herself with the community rather than trying to distance herself from it. During my time at the school I had heard other teachers talk about "those people" and "them" rather than "us". In this sense "us" refers to the overall school community of which the teachers are part, regardless of whether they would like to be or not.

It was while I was on relief here at Progress Primary School that the headmaster approached me and asked me if I would be interested in a part time position on the kinder. And I said, "Yes I would love it".

Anastasia welcomed the opportunity to teach in a kindergarten setting although she was quick to point out that if the position had not been offered to her, she would probably not have applied for such a position.

Now, I had never had anything to do with Kinders. To me they were a little bit of a mystery and I sort of didn't know what went on in kinder. I could always tell when I had the preps, I could tell which children had benefited from kinder. By just their social development, their motor skills, they knew what school was about; you know.

Anastasia taught for two terms part-time on the kindergarten class. Her position became full time and she has taught here since. Anastasia had never taught in a kindergarten before.

I think that it is the most rewarding class that I've ever taught. They come in raw from home (laughs) - they want to go and "have a piss" (laughs) - don't know anything about sitting down, or crossing legs or little hands up, or arms, pretty much here. The whole year - it's a real social year. Learning, taking turns, sharing, using the proper jargon at school "may I go to the toilet?" - different language, learning respect for their teachers, enjoying a real full day.

Becoming a kindergarten teacher also provided Anastasia with an opportunity to expand her knowledge base in areas that she had not considered previously.

Being a kinder teacher has made me look more into the study of that early child, whereas because I had been an infant teacher - I sort of more or less taught the 6 – 9 years old age group. So I have been doing, over the last couple of years, readings on them and their play - the importance of play, and what stages of development they are at. Even their humour - how that's not sort of developed much at this stage and yes - and all that sort of thing. So it's helped me there I suppose being a kinder teacher to understand.

"I put in for a couple of thousand dollars this year although I don't think that I will get it". Anastasia continued talking to me about other kindergarten playgrounds that she had experienced. "Most of the kinder playgrounds that I have worked in or seen have not been this big. This one is great. We're really lucky to have so much room".

I notice a large colourful sign that has been stuck on the wall of the room. "We are talking about spring". Butterflies made of cardboard cut out and toilet rolls hang from the ceiling. They sway gently on the cool breeze that emanates from the window that is open at one end of the classroom.

A parent comes and tells Anastasia that she is going. "He's a well adjusted little boy". The parent looks pleased to hear the news. "You've done a great job. He listens well - is bright - takes part in all of the activities. He's great". The parent

begins to tell Anastasia about her other child. "Yes but she is only two". The parent agrees and then says goodbye.

"Evan, can you walk down those stairs properly?"
Evan returns to the top of the stairs that form part of the obstacle course and this time steps down to the first stair and the jumps to the ground.
"Evan, please walk down the stairs properly".
This time Evan walks down each stair one at a time and then smiles at Anastasia "Thanks".
This forms part of the kindergarten check and therefore it was necessary to see Evan walk down the stairs, one foot after the other, something that he surely would have been able to do given it takes a great deal more coordination to jump from the top of the stairs and land on both feet, in a position to run off to something more exciting. Anastasia continues to observe each of the children as they make their way around the obstacle course. She looks occasionally in my direction. I get the feeling that she is not all that happy about the kindergarten check. Being the naïve observer, provided me with an opportunity to ask her about it.

"One of the greatest challenges that I find as a kindergarten teacher is the kindergarten check list (a hint of annoyance is conveyed in her voice). I don't find observing them any challenge - that's great. Putting it on to computer – wonderful. Talking to parents - great. It is identifying and putting down in black and white the children at risk. I find that I just agonise over it so much that I am nearly physically sick by the time that I've finished the kindergarten checklist. Because unless a child really is at risk, they say, something like two indicators out of a block or something and they are at risk. I don't think they've allowed enough for, just normal child development. And how long are these children going to be kept on the computer as "at risk". And it might be just because they haven't stuck to the little black line cutting, you know. That's very difficult and you have physically to put it in the computer and it's going to go to the data warehouse, at risk".

I smiled, surprised again by the honesty of Anastasia's comments. Was she telling me about the kindergarten check because I had asked or was she telling the people who would eventually read the words that I placed on the page?

Nadia, Wade and Jess are playing in one of the smaller sandpits and Kurt is playing on the edge of the group. Anastasia explained to me that Kurt does not often join in, but instead plays alongside the other children. "Jess was wanting some water, would

you like to get it for her?" Kurt says no but after some more thought changes his mind. Returning with the water Kurt reluctantly passes it to Jess who is still in the sandpit. "Good boy". Kurt only joined the class some three weeks after the year had started and this may have been part of the reason that he had not made friends with many of the children. "He does not seem to approach the other children and it is rare for them to approach him".

"I find our outdoor playtime is a challenge, thinking up ways of how to use the equipment so the children can hop or jump or land on their two feet or catch a ball as they go through something", Anastasia explains to me.

Anastasia rings the packing up bell and reminds the children that they must bring all of the equipment from the yard and place it in front of the storeroom. Three boys struggle to carry the stairs. I provide them with some assistance as they talk about who is the strongest. Anastasia and Lorraine pack the equipment away and then the children return to the classroom, hang up their hats and sit on the mat in front of Anastasia's chair. The afternoon session begins with the children talking about what day of the week it is and then counting the number of words and letters in the phrase "Happy Easter". "Children look at the words and show me where you can see this word written." Anastasia holds each of the words from the phrase as the children point to the appropriate word that was written on the board.
"Good listeners are good lookers. You need to look at me so that I know that you are listening". Jackson stands up and moves over toward a table that has some play dough and a number of biscuit cutters and rolling pins. He then starts playing with the materials while the rest of the class participates in more work with words and letters. Anastasia introduces the activities to the children and they move off to work. The activities are the same as in the morning.

Adel is rummaging through the dress up box. She dresses herself in a lace shawl, a pair of high heels and a belt and then moves into the home corner. "I'm home" she announces to a doll that she has placed at the table.

"Do you need a tissue for your nose?" Anastasia asks Julian. He stands, walks across the room and gets a tissue. On the way back she stops off to have a look at what some other children are doing at the butterfly cutting out table.
Brie finishes her work "You can do a puzzle now" Lorraine suggests.

Wade, an average sized boy with light brown curly hair has a back pack that resembles a teddy bear, he refuses to take it off. Natasha and Caroline are in the puppet theatre putting on a puppet show. They do not seem to mind that there is not an audience.

Three children are now in the home corner, Abbey dressed in a shawl, Kurt who is sitting in the corner and Brie who is sitting in the small wooden bed at the front of the home corner.

Wade wanders around the room.
"Where did you get your bag?" I enquire.
"The shop" Wade replies bluntly, but then removes the bag from the back and shows me the inside of it. There is nothing in there.
"You can put stuff in it there". He points to a concealed pocket that is also empty. With the demonstration of how the bag works complete, he places it on his back, and then moves from one activity to another, not really engaging in any of them.

Anastasia has returned to the kitchen and gets out the ingredients to make scones for afternoon tea. She leaves the kitchen and stands at the door way "If you want to do some cooking you need to come to the kitchen, you know where it is."

There are only two takers for cooking. Georgia and Nadia stand near the bench which is at the same height as their shoulders. They stretch as far as they can. Anastasia explains what they have to do in order to make the scones. "Good girl, now you have a little turn". Anastasia brushes some flour from the front of Nadia's dress and tells her to wash her hands again. Nadia makes her way toward the bathroom although she stops to have a look at the fish in a tank near the entrance to the classroom.

"Here you go, you can mix this, we will give Nadia a turn after you." Georgia begins mixing the scone dough "just hold the bowl with your other hand" Anastasia comments as the bowl nearly falls from the bench. Even though there are only two takers for cooking, Anastasia has her hands full. I can only imagine what it is like when more than two children want to take part in cooking. It is not only cooking that requires considerable energy.

It's extremely hard work. You're on the go the whole time. Someone has to be with them all the time. Even if it's just flipping to the toilet, Lorraine and I tell one another if we're going to be leaving the room because anything could happen. We are always on the alert for scissors and pencils, sharp corners on desks, hot glue guns (laughs) and that sort of thing. It's just so hard - hard work. When I go to bed I'm just sort of zonked out (laughs).

"It's good fun at school isn't it?" Anastasia asks Nadia. She nods. Georgia begins to recite the ingredients that had been used to make the scones. "Cornflour?" she asks Anastasia.
"No it's just plain flour".
Anastasia allows the children to place the scone mixture onto the trays after she has formed it into the correct size and shape.

"Can I go to the toilet?"
"You know that you can go. You do not need to ask".

"Is it home corner time?" Evan shouts from across the room.
"Yes you can move into the home corner." Evan gets one of the prams, which has a life-like doll in it. Fleur joins him in the home corner. Evan is trying to put up the blackboard, although accidentally trips on the legs and falls over. He and Fleur laugh. Heather, who has also moved in to the home corner, is talking on the telephone. After a short conversation, she hangs up the phone, arranges a doll in its pram and then takes it on a tour around the classroom pointing out certain activities that are occurring.

Sitting on the floor, Anastasia helps Grant complete a floor puzzle that was twice as large as the one that he had just finished. Her presence on the floor quickly entices a number of other children to become involved. Natasha who had been working in the

puppet theatre spots the puzzle and leaves. Caroline remains, and she now has a puppet on both hands.

"You keep you ears open for the bell, then we can have a nice warm scone" Anastasia tells Nadia who had been helping with the cooking. Anastasia asks if she would like to draw a picture of what they had done to make the scones.
"I can't" she replies. With some further encouragement from Anastasia she decides that she could have a "little try".

"The big globe, who can see that?" Anastasia continues asking the children a range of questions about the pieces of the puzzle to help them find the correct piece.
"That's beautiful, put it over there to dry", Anastasia comments to one of the children who had brought her butterfly over to show her.

"Hello Adduct, I haven't given you a kiss today." Anastasia bends down and gives a large black doll a kiss on the head. Evan and Adduct continue their tour of the classroom.

I have watched Anastasia as she moves from one activity to another, to another and then back to the first over a number of days. The nature of kindergarten and other early childhood classes suits Anastasia's personality. In particular, the range of activities that are undertaken in a session.

I hate doing the same thing at the same time all the time. That is not me at all; I mean I'm a typical Sagittarian. So, I just love all the activities, a little bit of maths here - yes, alright we will make puppets and we'll have a puppet show. I don't mind routines Of course, school especially kinder would be the most consistent thing a lot of them would know. They come to school. They put up their hats. They do their activities. They go outside after morning tea. They love that routine. I just hate doing the same thing day in day out. I could never work in a factory or something - it would drive me mad. Kinders really suit me because of their short concentration span and they can go from activity to activity and then they need help over at the computer and then they need me somewhere else - then I'm wiping a nose or something, Yes, that suits my personality.

Anastasia has returned to the floor and begins helping the children once more with the puzzle. Lorraine is still helping the children make their butterflies. She is called on at regular intervals to reattach parts of the butterflies that the children have

accidentally cut off. "Try not to cut the wings or the head off" she comments to some of the children who are still cutting out while she sticky tapes the wing of a girl's butterfly back on.

The home corner has become a hive of activity. Kiri and Brie are dressed in long white gowns and carry a tray of drinks from the home corner offering them to other children in the class. I focus my attention back on the children who had been playing Snap, although they are not at the table. They have joined Anastasia on the floor and are also helping to complete the puzzle. It appears that the children gravitate toward the area of the room in which Anastasia is working.

Anastasia picks up a jumper that has been left on the floor and scours the room for its owner.
"Mrs Scott, Andy said shut up".
"I have told you already today that you don't use that kind of language here. It is unacceptable". Anastasia turns and looks at me with a smile on her face. We had spoken about this type of thing previously.

We have the school rules of course, but I do try and keep a minimum of the school rules in the classrooms, little things like no running. We learn later on, perhaps the end of first term, something like to put their hands up and take turns, all that sort of thing. Just a gradual introduction that's I see my role.

"Maybe we should send him back to crèche again" Grant who is sitting nearby adds to the conversation.
"No, we enjoy having him here".

The room is noisy, as children talk to one another while they go about their work. Natasha and Caroline who had been playing in the puppet theatre are now at the large wooden doll's house near the computer. They rearrange the furniture; they also hold a doll each and have a conversation as if it were the dolls talking.

Wade holds Anastasia's hand as she moves back toward the puzzle.

The bell has gone indicating that the scones are ready although Georgia and Nadia who had helped with cooking them do not seem to have noticed.

"Do you want to see your scones?" Anastasia asks Georgia. She does not seem that impressed with the idea although follows Anastasia to the kitchen. Her return to the classroom was more enthusiastic as she informs Nadia about the scones.

"When everything is tidied up. I want you to sit on the floor in front of the whiteboard. Could you leave the puzzle there, don't pack it up. Packing everything else away".

All of the children sit down on the mat, as close to Anastasia's feet as possible. The class sing "Everybody Do This" along with the hand actions to accompany the words.
"Eyes to me. We are not going to pack that away because it took a long time to put together. Hand up if you made your bee today?" (I thought that they were butterflies)
"Great!"
"Evan may I have the toy please?"
Evan looks toward the floor as he reluctantly passes the steam engine to Anastasia.

Jackson is asked to turn off the speaker on the computer. He does not know what the speaker is or how it can be turned off. Anastasia moves over to the computer.
"This is the speaker. This is where the sound comes out". Jackson looks at the speaker. "You need to press that button there." Jackson presses the button. "You know when it is off when the light goes out".
I began to wonder why Anastasia had not just turned off the speakers herself. It would have been quicker, although this would run counter to one of Anastasia's philosophies.

I try to make the children independent. I usually model the activity first and then they can go off and do it.

"All right, ready for the kangaroo song?" Anastasia moves toward the corner of the room and switches on the tape recorder. The drone of a didgeridoo can be heard and the children look puzzled. "Someone has been playing with the tape". Anastasia is not able to find the tape, instead she begins to sing another song while Lorraine continues looking for the tape.

An old aquarium sits on the bench that runs along the back of the classroom, under the large windows that look out into the kindergarten yard. The aquarium had a crack in it. I had filled it with soil during a previous visit. Several bright flowering plants are now contained in the tank, dark purple flowers contrast sharply with the green foliage of the plants. A teacher from one of the primary classes has come into the kindergarten to borrow something. Anastasia goes into "Aladdin's Cave" to look for the resource that the teacher had requested. Lorraine works with the children who are doing some movement to music, as the tape had been found amongst the books that are shelved on a trolley on which the tape recorder sits. Anastasia returns and the other teacher leaves the kindergarten with a large plastic water tub under each arm.

The song comes to an end and Anastasia signals to Lorraine to turn it off. "Okay, let's make a lovely circle". The children sit on the mat in the centre of the room. Anastasia also joins them in the circle. Lorraine, standing at one of the tables in the wet area has started to prepare the materials required for tomorrow. Several of the children start collecting shapes from the pile in the middle of the circle before they are supposed to.
"Wait, wait, you need to listen to the story before you know which ones to pick up". Several of the children sit back in the circle and are reluctant to be involved. Anastasia encourages them and they start to participate in the activity.
A stuffed brown falcon is perched on a piece of weathered wood. Its eyes are fixed on the class watching them patiently. Perhaps it was the falcon, on loan from the museum, that initiated the conversation I had with Anastasia about birds earlier in the day.

"Where's my bunny! Where's my bunny!" Brie jumps up, her long blonde hair flowing behind her as she frantically searches the room for a small purple rabbit that she had with her earlier. The rest of the class, disrupted momentarily look over to see what the commotion is about and then return their attention to Anastasia.
"I think that I can see it in the motor bike box" Nelson calls out.
"My, you must have good eyes to be able to spot the rabbit in there". Nelson smiles broadly and then faces the centre of the circle. Brie returns to the group, embracing the rabbit firmly in her arms.

Anastasia packs up the shapes and then sits in front of the class. She holds a large pile of cards. She holds up the first one. "That's my name". Abbey stands and begins to move toward her bag

"No! Today we are going to do some work with numbers. I want you to listen carefully and then tell me the numbers that I have just said".

"One, five, eight, three"

"One, five, eight, three" Abbey repeats the number and gets her afternoon tea from her bag.

Several more children complete the same routine until Anastasia is interrupted.

"Go back, back - go right back. You will walk back here". Anastasia has to ask several children to return to where they had been and not run back. This continues until all of the children are sitting on the mat with their afternoon tea. "I'll just wash my hands and butter those scones".

Anastasia carries the plate of scones out to the children and offers them around as the class eat their Afternoon tea.

"Can you tie up my shoelace?" Heather asks me. "Don't you know how to tie them?"

"Yes but it'll turn into a big knot and then I won't be able to fix it". I tie up the shoelace and Heather thanks me with a smile.

"Remember to eat something healthy first!" Anastasia reminds the class.

"He's got no lunch box" Jackson comments. The same child also arrived without a bag.

"That's alright, his food is fine". Anastasia informs the concerned member of the class.

"What do I eat first"? Kurt asks Anastasia as he stands holding a packet of biscuits and an apple.

"The healthy things are what you should eat first".

"What do you do when you have spilt something?" Evan has kicked over his drink bottle and a large pool of red cordial has formed in the middle of the room. Evan just looks at the drink on the floor, "Well". Evan jumps to his feet, gets a cloth, and dabs at the carpet in an attempt to clean up the drink. Although he looks around the room

while this is being done, most of the cordial remains on the carpet. Anastasia remains in her seat.

Anastasia is trying to work out which children had completed the egg decorating activity. She asks each of the children if they have completed the activity, writing the names of the children who have not on post-it notes. The process is running smoothly until Anastasia asks Nadia if she had completed the activity. "Have you done one of these?"
Nadia assumes that she is talking about the piece of work that Anastasia is holding up as an example is hers.
"No".
"Yes you did, you wrote your name on the back"
"It's over there" Nadia comments as she points in the direction of the wet area.
"You can never assume what a child is going to pick up" Anastasia comments to me as she shakes her head.
"Let's keep our voices down. What are you doing Samantha?"
"I'm just killing this ant".
"Why are you killing that poor ant?"
"So that it can't bite me".
"Darling, I'm sure that it won't bite you unless you are trying to do something to it".
"I only kill the really big ants" (signals with hands an ant that would be avoided at all costs, approximately 20 cm in length)

Anastasia indicates to the children that it is time for them to pack away their lunch boxes and drink bottle and put them in their bags.
"When you have done that come and sit down on the mat ready for a story".
The children return in small groups. Anastasia begins to read a story to the class. Several of the children move closer together while others isolate themselves from the group and find their own space. Evan stands up abruptly and walks over to the rubbish bin. Picking the lid of the bin up off the floor he slams it on top of the bin and does the handles up. The bin is dragged across the room disrupting the other children and the story. Anastasia looks at him and gestures for him to be quiet. She continues with the story until she is forced to stop again to reprimand Jackson for throwing a small plastic figure across the room.

The first year of formal schooling is very important, not only for their development but also for their perception of the rest of their schooling. I think if they don't enjoy kinder, what hope is there for later on.

Anastasia is committed to this ideal and "Treasure Time" is one way in which she reinforces the children's place in school.

"Treasure Time" Anastasia calls to the children. This is the time when the children are given their work to take home.
"Why does Mrs. Scott call you rainbows?"
"Because we're beautiful". The class respond proudly and enthusiastically and are then dismissed.

Chapter Five - Sam

I enjoy my work as a kindergarten teacher because the children that I'm working with are so young that they're spontaneous and they're natural and their enthusiasm for learning is so interesting to watch and to be involved in. It's just that age group... the innocence, the independence and all that sort of stuff that goes with four year old children really impresses me. I wouldn't teach any other grade. I think it is one of the most rewarding jobs that you can do. I don't want to do anything else.

Dr. Simmons is visiting the school today. When I arrive at the school there are a group of people erecting signs, several of them are hanging a banner across the school sign. "A fair go for schools" one of the signs read, the thick black letters stand in contrast to the white paper. I give it no more thought and make my way toward the classroom. Several teachers greet me as I walk through the door and down the corridor. It is a nice day, well nicer than it has been. The sun is out although it is still cold. As I approach the classroom the sound of the children becomes louder. I have to step abruptly to the left so that I can avoid a child who is skipping down the corridor.

"We're all madly awaiting the arrival of Dr Simmons today". The visit is the first thing that Sam talks to me about when I enter the classroom. (Dr Simmons is a politician who is making a visit to the school although no one in the school seems to know why).

A pile of catalogues sit on top of the fish tank, advertising a range of educational products and books. The clear water of the tank filters the light, casting a dancing pattern of light across the table. There are no fish in the tank, despite the water being clean enough, although there is still a container of fish food on the windowsill. Sam is standing in the centre of the courtyard while the children play. A small group of parents have also gathered in the courtyard after dropping their children off. Talking to the parents, Sam discusses the cost of the local show. The opportunity to talk to parents and interact with them is one aspect of teaching in a kindergarten environment that Sam enjoys.

Working with the whole families and being involved with groups of people rather than just individuals.

Inside the classroom, there is a girl playing with some play dough while Steven writes and draws at a table near the door to the courtyard.

"What rides did you go on at the show?" Sam asks Anne who stands nervously tugging at the collar of her windcheater.
"Go on, talk to Sam" her mother comments as Anne attempts to hide between her legs.
"I went on the train".
"Twice," the mother comments as she smiles down at Anne.
"Two train rides!" Sam comments while looking around the room to see what the other children are doing.

"You might be able to do some writing and drawing about the show, or a painting" Sam comments to Anne.
Alex walks past with his shoelace trailing behind him.
"Come and let me fix up your shoe". Alex puts his foot forward. The lace is already done up. "No, the other one".

"Guess what?" Jody asks Sam.
"What?"
Jody discusses all of the things that she has received for her birthday. Sam asks her several questions about what she did for her birthday and the presents that she received.
"Was it a short dress or a long dress?"
Jody looks puzzled. Sam stands, indicating the length of the dress with hand gestures. The child nods to both options, so Sam continues to ask her a range of questions.
"A long one" she comments after some time.

Each of the day's activities is set out on the tables, waiting to be explored by the children when they arrive. Today the children have a choice of painting, play dough, box construction, writing and drawing. In addition to this there is an obstacle course,

some musical instruments and several other activities set up under the cover of the courtyard roof. There is a large wooden dolls house, some big wooden blocks and a number of books on the shelves near the windows that run the length of the classroom.

Sam is outside while the children are playing. Jasmine is inside talking to one of the children. "I'll have a look later but I have to finish outside first". Cathy, the girl who had been talking to Jasmine approaches me with a broad smile on her face. She has deep brown eyes and her long brown hair is tied neatly back in a pig tail. She is much smaller than the other children. "I've made a chatter box".
"A chatter box, what's that for?" I enquire.
Cathy looks at me for several seconds, as if I should know what she is talking about. She explains to me what the "chatter box" is.
"My sister showed me how to make them. I need some scissors". She returns with the scissors and sits next to me. She carefully cuts along the folds and looks over to me. "It's hard you know". She throws the piece of paper away and gets another. As she takes her seat this time she sits closer to me.

Jasmine and Sam are outside talking as they take a range of equipment from the storeroom and set it up. They are talking about one of the children in the class and what equipment they will get out for the session. Ivan returns to the classroom from outside. He is carrying a large plastic truck. On closer observation I notice that it has been broken. He then moves over to the computer and sits down.

"I left my cordial at home".
"Well what would you like me to do?" Sam asks in an encouraging manner.
"A glass of water".
"You would like me to get you a glass of water?" Alex nods.

A number of children are unsure about the direction they are supposed to move around the obstacle course in, despite a number of large paper arrows stuck on the ground at regular intervals along the course. Jasmine explains what they are supposed to be doing while the children begin to work their way around the course.

Mary has been busy drawing a picture and brings it over to show Sam.

"It looks like a scary picture".

Mary nods in agreement.

"Your dad's not a scary person" Sam comments, although I was not able to hear what the child had said to prompt this comment from Sam. The two of them continue a conversation about something that happened at home although I tune out, it is neither necessary to record the details nor something that I particularly want to hear. Conversations such as this are not rare enough and these types of things are one aspect of working with children and their families that Sam finds stressful.

The worst things for me are when you've got problems with the families and you've got to deal with them and try and help sort them out. Dealing with children and families in unusual situations... I find it really stressful if I have to have anything to do with kids who I know have been abused, or who are not being looked after very well. Then you've got to deal with, not only with the parents but probably with a lot of other agencies and I find that really stressful because you feel a lot like you're sort of poking into other people's lives rather than just doing the job which you're trained for which is basically working with 4 year old children. But, that's not the only part of it you know, you do, once you become a kindergarten teacher you actually become involved with families and communities, not just the children.

Sam gave the impression that this was not something that teachers of older children have to deal with on a regular basis.

I think as you work with older children, you'd probably become less concerned with the family but when you're working with really little kids you know, your primary concern is the children and their family. So I find that really difficult because, it's hard to switch off and you do take a lot of it to heart and you feel responsible and you want things to be right all the time and, so it does become quite tricky and quite stressful. I think that is the worst part of the job.

Working with families is a double edged sword, although these contacts do not always have negative implications.

On the other hand that can be really rewarding as well because if something works really well, you know, you've got a big problem and you help solve it and there's really good consequence from the work you've done, you feel really pleased you've been involved and that sort of thing. So on the one hand it can be stressful and on the other hand you can get a lot of satisfaction from it.

There are four large trees in the yard. A bench has been set up in the middle of the courtyard in the shade. Its surface is covered with a variety of coloured wooden blocks. Andrew is playing with the blocks by himself although he stops at regular intervals to flick through the pages of a book that he had placed next to him at the table. There is a large sand pit that several children are playing in.

Kane, Jack and Malcolm are seated at the back of the classroom eating their lunch despite having being at school for only an hour or so. I am a little surprised, although no one else seems to be. It does not seem that out of place when Sam's rationale for the type of program offered to the children is considered.

We don't break the session up with timetabling reasons or recess or anything like that. The children choose when they want to have something to eat and drink. The program that I run is what we term a continuous program. The program was sort of coined in the 70's / 80's by a group of kindergarten teachers. The term "continuous program" describes the idea that the children come to school at whatever time and they leave at whatever time but within that time they are here they are continuously involved in the learning program that they've actually chosen to be involved in. The children have continuous access to experiences in the outdoor environment and the indoor environment. They make decisions about where they're working and what they're working on.

In order to accommodate the needs of each child in the class they are provided with a range of experiences and also encouraged to participate in a variety of tasks.

I suppose within the program my role is to make sure that all children experience the whole range of activities that are available and to assist individual children where they need that assistance most... really to give the children the opportunity to make decisions and to choose their own learning paths.

When I first entered Sam's classroom I was surprised by how things operated. It was not what I expected.

I suppose the program is a little bit different to some of the more traditional programs where they're broken into blocks of indoor time and outdoor time... everyone sits down and has their morning tea at the same time, that sort of thing. The reason that I run my program the way I run it is because it's more like the natural environment the children would be in, in their home. They choose to play inside, play outside. They go to the fridge and help themselves to morning tea when they're hungry. They go to the toilet when they feel like it... you know, they're not regimented by timetable and clocks and things. I find that to be the best way to work with kids at school as well.

A rope ladder suspended from a frame made of treated pine logs is a popular attraction. Several children stand waiting for their turn while others sit on the edge of the large blue crash mat at the bottom. Sam is talking to a small group of children about how old they are.

Sam has moved and now stands at the block table. Sam's presence has resulted in increased activity at the block table, quickly joined by another three children.

"Sam come here!" Ivan yells from the other end of the courtyard.
"Please".
"Please come here".
"Certainly!"
"Why can't you get the computer to work?" Sam asks Ivan and begins to move several leads around. The problem is fixed and several loud sounds are emitted from the computer as Sam walks toward the courtyard. Sam approaches a group of aides who are working in the courtyard. The teacher from the classroom that is on the other side of the yard is also there. Sam asks to borrow some software and after some friendly ribbing, the other teacher goes to the storeroom and returns with the compact disk.

Eve is doing a puzzle at a low table in the classroom. Cathy who had been making the "chatter box" is still busy making yet another one. A mother has come into the classroom and asks about enrolling her child for kindergarten next year. Sam is working at the computer and Jasmine explains the programme and the times and days that the children will be attending. Sam is busy explaining to Ivan how the touch screen can be used instead of the mouse. Several of the children who had been eating their lunch are still there, although several others have joined them.

Edward and Clint are playing with the large wooden blocks. There is a loud bang as they slide two large blocks across the floor causing them to collide. The sudden noise causes me to jump. Stephanie plays in the home corner by herself. She is holding a tea pot which she has filled with sand. "That's for outside" Sam calls out as she pours the sand on to the carpet. Sam gets the teapot and takes both it and Stephanie

outside to the sandpit. The children are friendly. They come and talk to me, show me various things, explaining to me what they have been doing.

"You need to remember to put the lid on that" Jasmine comments, to Kevin who is working at the drawing table after he had not replaced a lid on one of the textas.

Sam has returned to the home corner with a dustpan and broom and begins sweeping the sand from the carpet. Stephanie stands nearby with a slight grin on her face. "You need to remember no sand inside" Sam comments to her.

Ivan has turned the monitor at right angles to the table and sits side on to the computer so that he is still able to see the screen. Kane attempts to turn it back around, and they begin to argue.
"Why is the monitor like that?" Sam asks.
"Because Ivan did it" Kane informs Sam.
"Well that is a bit silly, put it back".

"There is another enrolment for kinder next year Sam" Jasmine calls out.
"Great!"

"Are you ready to do some cooking?" Jasmine asks the children. The kitchen is at the back of the classroom although it is separate from the room itself. There is a large window so the classroom can be seen from the kitchen.
Sam is sitting at one of the small tables with Stephanie and completes some drawing with her. "Do you want a pencil or a texta?" Sam asks her. She does not answer as she reaches for the pencil.
"What colour have you got?" Sam asks although Stephanie does not acknowledge Sam's question.
"Let's see if we can hold your pencil a bit better". Sam takes her hand and attempts to place the pencil in a more standard grip. Smiling at me she pays no attention to what she is supposed to be doing. Stephanie is a category A[1] student and although she has a full time aide, Sam works with her one-to-one.

[1] Category A refers to 'students for whom the functional and educational impact of their disability is the most severe. These students generally require substantial, often highly specialised, support ... to access appropriate education and achieve appropriate educational outcomes' (Department of Education, 2003, p. 8).

Sam tells Aaron to go and get a tissue as he wipes his nose on his sleeve.
"Can you come and do some writing?"
Aaron nods and writes his name three times below the writing that Sam had placed on the page.
Sam sits at the table watching, "You did a beautiful job of writing your name".
"Look Sam, look!"
"Fantastic, you need to put that in the going home box, the white box. Good girl!"

Sam is interrupted by the sound of a child crying. Standing quickly Sam rushes outside to the courtyard "What happened?"
Sam returns to the classroom. It turned out that the child crying was only playing.
"It's not working" Kevin sings out to Sam.
"What do you mean the pencil's not working". Sam looks in my direction and then goes to the storeroom to help Jasmine find something. Stephanie has been sick, an aide rushes to get a cloth and cleans it up. It runs down her face and also onto the floor.

Malcolm rushes into the classroom, informing Sam that someone is "hogging the bike".
"Have you showed him the timer? Tell him he's got five minutes. Tell him if he's not off the bike then, we will have to put it away". Malcolm sets off outside although returns momentarily "We don't need to timer, he gave the bike to me".

"What's this?" Sam asks Alex, one of the children working in the wet area.
"A balancing bridge" he comments while continuing along with his painting.
Sam asks him several more questions about the painting. This is short lived, as Sam is required to move to the back of the room to comfort Stephanie who is crying.
"You're going to the specialist aren't you?" Sam asks Stephanie while rubbing her back.

"Cathy, I asked you to pick up those things that you threw on the floor".

Sam leaves the girl who had been upset and sorts out some of the pencils that have been mixed up with the textas. With this complete, Sam goes to the home corner.
"What are you going to cook?"
"Jack, I know that blenders are pretty noisy, but it shouldn't be that loud" Sam calls out to the child who is busy cooking a range of tempting meals in the home corner.

Anne and Jody come into the classroom carrying large rocks. They look very pleased with themselves although Sam looks less than happy. The girls struggle to carry the rocks.
"Ok, let's take those big rocks back to the rock area" Sam directs them.

Jasmine talks to me about Conrad, another Category A student. Conrad can now use the touch screen. "The first time he did it I got his mum to come in. She just bawled when she saw it because it was the first time that he had done anything independently". As I listen to the story I watch Sam who is now sitting near two corrugated plastic tunnels that form part of the obstacle course. Aaron has taken off his jumper "Sam can you tie this up for me?"
Aaron holds out his jumper. Sam nods and ties the jumper around Aaron's waist.
"I hope it's not too tight", Sam calls as Aaron runs toward the swing that he was reluctant to leave in the first place.

"What have you got all that sticky tape for?" Sam asks. Jody does not answer Sam and instead she crunches the tape into a ball and throws it onto the ground.
"We don't litter remember" Sam comments to her as she reluctantly picks the tape up and places it in one of two bins in the courtyard.

"Can I do that" Ivan asks Sam in reference to being able to have a turn in one of the tunnels.
"You can do whatever you like" Sam comments as Ivan makes his way to the tunnel.

Sam puts a ribbon back into Cathy's hair "I put a bow in it, is that right?" Cathy nods. Sam is sitting on a large tractor tyre in the centre of the playground. Chloe walks out of the classroom carrying several books and hands them to Sam.

"There's no tissues", one of the children yells to Sam.
"She's got snot everywhere" Sam comments while walking toward the classroom door. Sam had asked several children to go and get a tissue although they have disappeared.
Sam gets some more tissues from the storeroom.
"We'll find a couple of books and then go outside and have a story".
The sound of the timer can be heard ringing, although it is difficult to ascertain where the sound is coming from. The other children are working busily and they do not seem to notice that it is ringing.

Sam encourages Kevin to hang his jumper up with his bag rather than having it tied around his waist. Sam begins to read. The boy snuggles up against Sam. There is a cool breeze that gently drifts across the yard although it is barely noticeable through the heat of the sun. The groundsman drives past the yard on a ride-on-mower with a small trailer attached to it. He leaves the mower idling as he places something in the trailer.
"Sam," a child approaches the group.
"Wait on a minute Chloe, I'm reading".
Chloe waits to show Sam the hat that she has made.
"It's a queen" she comments and then sits down and listens to the story.

Sam has finished reading "No, that's enough stories now. What have you done?"
"I've made a queen".
"A queen's what? A crown? Let's see how it looks". Chloe places the crown on her head turns around several times and then walks off.
"Don't forget to write your name on it".

Kevin has returned. "Can you tie this?" Jimmy is holding his jumper out to Sam and wants it tied around his waist as several other children have done.
"No go and put it with your bag so that you don't lose it". Kevin is not impressed by Sam's response and throws the jumper on the ground. Sam smiles, tells him to pick it up and put it with his bag. Kevin looks around and then does as he is asked.

"Hello, where have you been?" Sam asks Sharon as she walks past.

"Cooking".
"What did you cook?"
"Patties" Sharon comments as she begins to walk away from Sam.
"Hang on Sharon, I want to talk to you some more about this cooking".

Sam calls Sharon a second time to talk more about the cooking that she had been doing. Sam asks a number of questions about the vegetables that she had used in the patties. Sharon has to be prompted several times as she had been giving only one word answers.

Aaron and Malcolm push strollers around the courtyard, although they are empty. Sam suggests to the boys that they need to be careful with the strollers.
"Pretend that the prams have babies in them".
The boys run off with the strollers and jump them off the logs.
"Poor babies!" Sam comments to me.

Sam returns to the classroom.
"We need everyone outside sitting, so we can try the cooking".
"Walking! Walking!"
The children sit on the steps that are at the front of the sand pit.
"Can I have the cooks out here?" The children walk out to the front of the group and answer Sam's questions about what they had cooked and the steps that they had followed to make the patties. The class begin to become rowdy although they had only been sitting there for several minutes. "Shh, listen!" The children complete their description of the cooking process. "All right, could everyone sit down now?" Sam comments while trying one of the patties.

"They're a bit warm still. It shouldn't burn anyone" Jasmine informs Sam.
"They're beautiful!" Sam comments after having bitten in to one of the patties to ensure that they were in fact cool enough for the children to eat.
The children sit in the sun eating the patties as Jasmine walks around with the plate.
"When you put your hands on a piece of food, that's the bit you pick up" Sam comments to several of the children who appear to have difficulty in choosing which of the patties they are going to eat.

"Remember to say thank you when you get one of the patties".
"Who liked them?"
"Yes" the majority of the class chorus.
Jasmine offers me one of the patties although I decline. Several of the children are reminded that they need to stay seated.
Steven begins to play in the sand while the rest of the class remain seated on the steps. "Steven you need to sit down and wait!". Steven reluctantly sits back down on the steps although it is clear that he is still thinking about the sand pit as he looks in the direction of one of the trucks that he had been using.

"Have a big stretch in the sun."
The children begin standing and stretching although this is short lived.
"It's stretching time, not being stupid time" Sam comments to Aaron and Malcolm who have begun to push each other. Sam informs the class they can return to what they had been doing.

Aaron and Malcolm head straight for the strollers and are soon running around with them. "Okay, Aaron and Malcolm, I would like to see the strollers back in the shed please".
The boys head toward the shed although only one of them makes it there. The other is sidetracked and Sam chases them up "You had better put that away now!"
Sam accompanies Aaron to ensure that he puts the stroller back in the shed.

One of the large wooden trucks has been broken.
"Ivan made me do it".
"Sam" Jack calls in an abrupt voice as he hands over the broken truck along with the part that has come off. Sam talks to the children about the truck and the fact that it was broken because they were fighting over who should use it. The truck is put in the storeroom.
"Instead of fighting over the truck what could you have done?" Sam asks. They do not provide an answer but instead shrug and look at the floor. Sam provides a number of suggestions as they nod, although it is not apparent if they were actually listening.

Sam has to return to the storeroom and this time comes out with a band-aid because Stephanie has hurt herself. She is sobbing although the wound does not look very bad. Sam puts the band-aid on her hand and she stops crying. The wound does not look like it warrants a band-aid although the child seemed to think it does.

I began to wonder why Sam had wanted to become a teacher, even though I already knew the answer I was still thinking about it anyway.

If I was going to be really, really, honest the reason I'm teaching now is financial, not for any other particular reason. That's not to say that I don't enjoy the work that I do. But the reason I've come back to teaching is because I couldn't support myself from the job that I'm doing at the moment without falling back on teaching. I always find teaching to be a really rewarding sort of thing to do, and I look forward to being at school and being with the kids. I don't always look forward to getting out of bed, but once I get to school and I'm with the kids I have a really good time and I do enjoy it and it does give me a lot of stimulation.

Sam had not intended to be a kindergarten teacher. Originally, being a music teacher was more appealing.

In the days that I trained there were studentships to support students training to be teachers but the Launceston campus didn't offer studentships in music so the counsellors at the time suggested that I apply for an early childhood studentship. When I got to college they suggested that I do a double music major and that would allow me to become a music teacher but on an early childhood scholarship.

So in a round about way I sort of fell into becoming a kindergarten teacher, not through choice, but through the situation that I was in. Anyway, when I got to college I did my double music major but I enjoyed the kindergarten training so much that I forgot about becoming a music teacher and just wanted to become a kindergarten teacher.

Sam graduated with a kindergarten specialisation and has been teaching for the past 20 years.

I think my first appointment was a kindergarten, prep, 1/2 in the one classroom and I had my first straight kindergarten when I moved to Portside two years later. (Long pause)

Sam has also been involved in teaching future kindergarten teachers.

I went to the university and I lectured at the university's teacher education course for eight or nine years. I had another year off and I've been a part time kindergarten teacher since. So I haven't really actually taught, officially taught anything much apart from kindergarten. I have worked with other primary age groups but not long term things, just lessons here and there. For example, I used to teach music when I was teaching at Lyland. I taught music with the grade 3, 4, 5 and 6 children as well. I haven't actually had classroom experience or full time responsibility for other groups apart from kindergarten.

There are now four children eating morning tea. Alex and Eve have sat themselves down at the drawing table. They provide me with a running commentary of what they are going to draw.

"There" Eve comments as she places the finishing touches on a drawing.

"That's for my Dad".

"I'm going to draw another picture".

"That looks like a dog. A dog with glasses on". Both of the girls begin to laugh.

"This is a card for my Dad".

"You're a happy little chappie today" Sam comments to Conrad who then proceeds to hit Sam's leg. "No hitting!" Sam comments in a slightly raised voice. Conrad just looks at him blankly.

"You've done another dog. Where's your name?" Sam talks to Alex about her drawings while heading toward the table where the children are eating their morning tea. "Is everyone right here?" The children indicate that everything is. Sam cleans up some food that has been spilt, and then goes outside to talk to another teacher.

"I'm a super hero"

"What super hero are you?" Sam asks in an encouraging manner.

"Super woman".

"What are you doing to be Super woman?"

"Playing a game".

"Who else is playing Super heroes with you?" Sam enquires while looking around the room.

Chloe, who is wearing a bright red cape, points to a group of children who are sitting on a large cushion.

"Remember that they're inside toys. They're special toys for when the younger kids come" Jasmine comments to Kane about the toys that are used for the pre-kinder class. "It doesn't matter how old they get they still want to play with the baby toys" Jasmine comments to me as she walks past.

Eve is attempting to make a love heart out of some red paper. She makes several attempts to draw and then cut out the heart, although she scrunches each of them up. She approaches Sam who draws a heart on the paper for her. She then proceeds to cut it out. She looks at the heart and smiles.

Sam is talking to Anne about her dad moving out the previous night. Anne explains to Sam what is happening at home and who she lives with. Anne is seated on a double seat with Sam next to her. She does not seem too concerned about the events of last night, which is not surprising because I found out later that this was the fourth time the Father had moved out and come back home. This may have attributed to her matter of fact account of the experience.

Kevin has returned to the classroom wearing a silk shirt that he has found in the dress up basket.
"That suits you, what colour is it?" Sam asks.
"Yellow".
"No, it's not yellow, it starts with gr..."
Kevin shrugs.
"It's green" Sam informs him.

Sam is given a book by Eve, which he begins to read after being joined by Alex. Cathy also joins them on the seat for the story.
"What is this story about?" Sam enquires.
"Frogs".
"I saw something about frogs in the newspaper the other day" Sam tells Alex who is still looking at the illustrations in the book.

"It's really hard to keep frogs at home, they're much better off in a pond or something" Sam comments to Eve who is asking about keeping some frogs as pets.

"Look Sam" one of the children points out something in the illustrations.
"That's right, tadpoles do turn into frogs" Sam responds.
"That's the end".
"That's right, that's the end of both stories".
"Again!"
"How about you read the story to me?"
Alex sits on Sam's knee. Sam reads the story to the children although is interrupted.
"No, I'm reading the story, you've had yours".

One of the aides is sitting at the table where the children are eating their morning tea. She is reading a story to one of the children while they eat.

Sam has collected a digital camera from the storeroom and takes pictures of the children while they are working, both inside and outside the classroom. Sam asks Carly who is sitting at the table drawing if she could do some painting so that he can take her photo for the newsletter.

Sam walks around the classroom searching for one of the children. Several minutes pass and Sam has found her. "Can you come and practice writing your name now as there is a free spot at the table?". The child nods and accompanies Sam to the table.
"What about the capital B, the first letter in your name?"
"That's fantastic. You need to write your name by yourself before you are finished".

Edward is attempting to write the letter "r". He appears to be having some difficulty in forming the letter. Noticing this, Sam moves over to where he is working.
"There's two ways". Sam comments to Edward while demonstrating both of the ways that the letter "r" can be formed.

"How about we get another sheet of paper so that you're not tempted to cheat" Sam comments to Kevin who has been tracing over his name that can faintly be seen through the paper. The only problem is that his name is reversed and he has copied it in this manner.
"There, copy over the top once more".
"Then can I go?"

"Yes".
"Okay, let's see you write your name here".

"Okay, I will do your name for you but first you go and start painting. One more practice over the top. I would like to see you do it really carefully this time".
"It's nice to see you concentrating. You forgot the dot," referring to the letter "i" in his name".

"Can you just check what Margaret is doing with the paper over there?" Sam asks Jasmine.
"David and Aaron can you come over here and practice your name?"
"It's easy!"
"I know, but I would like to see how you do it. Show me how you do that letter [pointing to the letter a]. Oh, fantastic Aaron, can you draw me a picture of your face as well?"
"Yeah" Aaron adds in a confident tone as he sets about drawing a self portrait in an enthusiastic manner.

Sam collects the attendance book that is situated next to the chair at the front of the room. "Jill's spent the whole week at home again".
"We've only got three away. Does anyone know about Wendy?" There is no response.
"Have you done your drawing?" Sam asks Aaron who smiles and nods.
"Well then you can put it in the going home box and you can go". Aaron hurries outside once he has put his work in the box that is situated on the end of the sink.

All of the children from the other kindergarten class are eating their morning tea. Noticing me looking in the direction of the other class, Sam points out a number of reasons why all of the children do not eat lunch at the same time in his class.
"I think the pressure has come from up there" Sam comments to me, in reference to the children being prepared for prep.

The slow changes that are taking place in kindergarten is a cause of concern for Sam

One of the things that I get a bit frustrated about these days is that kindergartens are beginning to lose some of the special feel that they had. We're beginning to lose the special sort of emphasis on the four-year-old child

This, according to Sam, can be partly attributed to the training that early childhood teachers receive, or lack thereof if kindergarten is regard as a specialisation.

We don't seem to be training kindergarten teachers to work with kindergarten aged children anymore. We've got a much more generalist view of early childhood and I think that that's detrimental to the kindergarten. Teachers who work with four year old children need to be much more aware of the individual needs of the children. They need to be much more aware of the needs of the family and the needs of the children within the family. They also need to be able to use the department documents and guidelines, outcomes, whatever you want to call them, to be able to translate them into to something that is useful for four year old children and to be able to see that you might have a particular outcome you're supposed to reach by the time the children reach prep or whatever, but they need to be able to see what the kindergarten teacher's responsibility is in helping to achieve that outcome.

The erosion of kindergarten and what makes it special can also be attributed to the way in which philosophies are viewed.

Even though we talk these days of having K - 6 or K - 10 or K - 12 schools with a common philosophy right through, I think you'll always find that the kindergarten, if you've got a kindergarten trained teacher, teaching in the kindergarten you'll find that there's quite a different feel and a different attitude towards the whole of the experience than there is in the rest of the primary school. One of the big differences between kindergarten and the other grades is the way Kinders are concerned with the four main areas of development; cognitive, social, emotional and physical with equal emphasis on all four rather than particular emphasis on cognitive development as is usual in older age groups in schools.

While we talk about a K - 6 philosophy we need to understand that the K part of the philosophy is where the 6 part of the philosophy should come from. It shouldn't come from the 6 down towards the kindergarten. I think that we are in danger of losing that... that focus and that emphasis the more we become whole schools and the more we develop whole school philosophies and whole school curriculums.
There is nothing wrong with a K - 6 philosophy but the kindergarten four year old children are special. They have special needs. That's not to say that five, six, eight year old children don't have special needs as well, but for kindergarten children, this is the first time that they've been away from their families for a significant period of time. It's the first time they've been thrown into a group where there are more than a few children together. Generally there are at least 20 children and only a couple of adults and so it's a really strange and new experience for the children.

Ensuring that children have a positive experience in kindergarten and their needs are catered for is an important consideration for Sam.

If we don't do it properly then kids are going to have a bad attitude towards the rest of their schooling. So there are a lot of conflicts or problems associated with the area but I think that we need to maintain the unique nature of kindergartens.

Sam is talking to Kevin about Mr Whippy and the ice creams that he sells. "Are you going to finish your name? Come on, let's see how you finish your name".

"We should be going on a trip to Hobart" Aaron suggests to Sam.
"That's a long way. I'm not sure whether we would have time but I am thinking about a trip to a farm or the bike centre" Sam suggests.

"Okay Kevin, you've done a good job of copying over my writing, let's see you do it by yourself".

"Check the look on this one's face" Sam calls to Jasmine in regard to Ivan who was listening to Sam's heart with a stethoscope. Sam moves over to check on what is wrong with one of the computers. Having fixed the computer, Sam resumes taking pictures with the digital camera. "Let me take a picture of you writing. Oh no! Lets see you holding the pencil properly".

"What's that?"
"It's a camera". Sam shows Kevin the camera and explains the function of each of the buttons. He takes the Kevin's picture and then shows it to him on the screen.

"Super woman" has returned with Eve who is also wearing a cape. They have a steering wheel cover and they are travelling in a flying car. They temporarily enter the classroom, do a lap of the room and then return to the courtyard. [I don't think that I've seen Super woman in the classroom for more than five minutes since I arrived]

"Kevin, where are you?"
"He's outside".

"He couldn't be outside".
"Oh, yes he is". Jasmine comments as if to say I told you so.
"Everyone, eyes to me. Okay, let me see everyone sitting down with a book. It's book time, time to read a book".

There is a group of boys standing at the table in front of where Sam is working. They shift their weight from one foot to another as they wait. Clint, a boy with a tangled mat of hair that falls straight down from his head and hangs just above his shoulders, leans and whispers something to David. They begin to laugh. Simon, looking a little lost, starts to laugh as well even though he appears to have no idea what the cause of the laughter is.

"Clint would you like to do some writing?" The other two boys look over at him. He shakes his head and begins to walk away from the others. Sam watches as he walks across the room.
"Oh yeah" Clint comments as he turns and begins walking back toward Sam. "Last night..." Clint recreates what happened at his house. I am not sure of the details although Sam looks at me occasionally to see if I am writing down any of what is being said. I am not.

The music that had been playing in the courtyard has stopped. I appreciate the resulting silence although this is short lived.
"It sounds like I might need to put another CD on".

"I used to be the best writer in the world, but not now!" Clint comments to Sam as he crosses out some of his work.
"Why do you think you're not now?" Clint does not respond other than shrugging his shoulders.

Steven is talking to Sam about taking his work home so that he can put it on his wall.
"Or you could put it on the wall here".
"No, at home" Steven raises his voice and whines.
"Oh okay" Sam concedes.

"I'm not in this class anymore", one of two boys tells me as they play with a magnetic construction set.
"What class are you in?"
"The one over there" he informs me while pointing to the other classroom that shares the courtyard with the kindergarten.
"Are you visiting?"
"Yeah".

Edward leaves the memory group and takes a small lunch box from his bag. The lunch box is plastered with stickers and his name is written in black permanent marker on the lid. He takes out his morning tea and sits eating it by himself. Jasmine is outside watching the children complete the obstacle course.

"You want to make a kite do you?" Sam asks Cathy and Jody after they show Sam the kites that the other class have been making. The girls smile and nod.

The apparent willingness on Sam's behalf to cater for the needs and interests of Cathy and Jody who wanted to make kites, illustrates one of the main roles that he adopts as a kindergarten teacher.

My role is more to help children achieve what is possible for them achieve rather than to actually work to a set of particular outcomes that have been designed by somebody external to the school or external to that group of children... yeah as a facilitator more than anything.

The notion of being a facilitator is something that Sam had touched on several times during our conversations. This perception also has an impact on the way in which Sam views the role of being a teacher.

I don't actually see myself in the traditional sense as a teacher... I don't have an agenda that I want the children to achieve by the end of the year. Whereas I suppose that's more difficult when you're working with older children not to have a set agenda, especially when you look at the guidelines that the government put out. There are certain literacy and numeracy outcomes that children must achieve. I suppose because we are dealing with four year old children those sorts of outcomes are less important than outcomes such as being able to be independent, being able to get on with each other, being able to solve problems and those sorts of things.

Sam looks at me in a slightly bemused manner, and then goes into the other classroom to see how the teacher had been made the kites. Sam returns to the room holding several sheets of brightly coloured paper and places the paper on one of the trolleys in front of the window and then starts to pack away the play dough. Sam folds the paper in the desired manner and then returns it to the children so that they are able to draw a design or picture on the kite.

"Can you make me one?" Kevin who is now wearing a red and blue dress has approached Sam.
"No, I'll help you make one", Sam comments to Kevin who has taken a seat at the small table in the centre of the room.

Sam continues making the kites with the children as several more children approach the table, making the kite activity one of the most popular activities for the morning.
"I have to go and get some more paper and straws".
Sam takes several minutes to return from the storeroom.
"Come on Sam" Malcolm, who is now jumping around in circles on the spot awaiting Sam's return, comments to no one in particular.

Sam continues helping the children to make kites, attaching the tails and string to the kites that have already been made and helping other children fold and attach the straws.
"You have to be patient remember" Sam reminds Cathy who was trying to get her kite made quickly by attempting to push in front of a line of children who were waiting.

While Sam describes his work as a facilitator, there are times that he must adopt different roles.
"What's wrong?" Sam asks one of the children who has entered the classroom crying. Tears run down his face as he tries to regain his breath and explain to Sam what has happened.

I suppose also as a person who helps keep the peace and keep control... you know, provide a safe and secure environment for the children to be in.

"Jake hit me".

Sam turns to face Jake who has also come inside, aware of the trouble that he may be in.

"Why did you hit Steven?"

"I don't know".

Stephanie, one of the children with special needs stands near the doorway, surveying the courtyard and occasionally glancing back inside the classroom.

"She constantly needs to be watched" Sam comments to me as I observe her. I have witnessed her attempt to climb the kindergarten fence on several occasions. As with other kindergarten classrooms, the fence clearly divides the kindergarten playground from that of the rest of the school. It is often more than the school grounds that are divided by the fence.

I suppose it's just a lack of understanding of what goes on here and because traditionally kindergartens are separate from the rest of the school physically in terms of the building and the space and that you usually have a fairly well defined yard with a fence, you know so you do have that physical separation from the rest of the school.

Perhaps the fence is not only in place to protect kindergarten children and provide them with a safe and secure environment.

I think a lot of other people are frightened of kindergarten children... frightened of four year old children... frightened of their parents... frightened of that whole family situation and they're frightened that they wouldn't really know what to do with a group of four year old children or how to deal with them for a three or three and a half hour period of time.

The physical separation of the kindergarten is not the only factor that can create a lack of understanding about what occurs in kindergarten. The kindergarten is also separate in terms of the hours it operates and this has implications for Sam's contact with other teachers at the school.

You don't get a recess time and often your lunchtime is at a different time to the rest of the staff. You don't get to be in the staffroom and be around at the same time that everyone else is, so the rest of the school do see you as a separate person and that you've got a separate job. They don't see the links often between what goes on here and what goes on in the rest of the school. The only time that there seems to be a fair

bit of communication between the kindergarten and the prep and the grade one would be toward the end of the year when the prep teachers want to know who the kids are that are coming up to prep next year or into grade one or whatever... what they can do and what they can't do. Then you often have a fair bit of negotiating and a fair bit of discussion with those teachers to make them understand that what you've been doing through the year is the stuff you should be doing for the four year old child and it's not necessarily aimed at making them ready for prep.

This situation can also impact on the perception that other teachers hold in relation to kindergarten and more specifically the work of kindergarten teachers.

That has a negative effect on how the prep teachers see you because they often think that you haven't done the right things because you might be sending up half your class and they can't write their names and that, for the prep teacher, is a real hassle. If they had the same sort of philosophy as the kindergarten teacher it wouldn't be a hassle at all because they would just be working with the children from where they're at and developing the program according to the children's needs and interests.

Sam is still helping make kites, talking to each of the children at the same time. Some of them are seated although there are also several children who appear to be hovering around the table. The children who have already completed a kite come in and out of the room telling Sam how well the kites fly.

"Gee, I was pleased with how you did all of that fantastic writing today".
"I put it in there" Kevin points in the direction of the "going home box". Sam smiles at Kevin, it is things like this as well as bigger achievements that makes kindergarten teaching so rewarding for Sam.

I suppose just being with the children for a year and seeing the development that occurs and you don't really notice it so much until you get to the end of the year and you have to write for example, a report on the children and you think really hard about, about what they were like when they first came to school and you really do see the development over the year and that's probably one of the most rewarding things too.

You know that you've had a positive impact on the children and that it's been not only the program that you offer but the way that you offer it and the sort of experiences that you're offering that have led the children to make the development that they've made. It's a really good feeling at the end of the year to actually to say goodbye to the kids and to know that you've actually helped them to get from where they started to where they've finished. That's a really nice feeling. I mean it's a nice feeling to get rid of the kids as well, after a long hard year, but when you reflect on what you've achieved with them... it's a really good feeling.

Sam is trying to wind up the kite making although Edward protests loudly because he had not been able to have a turn.
"It's not fair" Edward grumbles as Sam attempts to pack away the materials for making kites. Sam looks at Edward, smiles and quickly makes him a kite, much to his delight.

Kevin, who is still working on the design for his kite, is having difficulty. He attempts to explain what aspect of the design he is not able to work out, although neither Sam nor I are able to understand what he is talking about.
"I can't understand what you want me to do" Sam informs Kevin who is becoming increasingly annoyed. Sam then goes outside to watch the children as they fly the kites they have made.

I have noticed Aaron and Malcolm chasing each other around outside making what I assume are dog noises. They run at full speed around and around the perimeter of the yard. They arrive at the door to the classroom and upon entering the classroom they begin to crawl around the room, still making dog noises. They do this for several minutes and then stand, walk to the door and then run off making more dog noises although somewhat louder than those emitted while inside.

Eve approaches Sam with a collection of various shaped boxes that have had pieces of material and other odds and ends attached to them. The random assortment of boxes is actually a boat. Eve explains each of the various design features to Sam.

"Do you have a jumper?"
"No, no jumper" Kane comments. I am wearing a short sleeve shirt and begin to think about how cold it is. My attention is drawn back to Aaron and Malcolm. They have returned to the classroom, breathing heavily after running constantly for at least ten minutes. They curl up on the floor, their faces flushed, still making dog noises in between breaths.
"What are you doing?"
They look at me with puzzled looks on their faces.
"We're dog boys" they state in unison.
"Dog Boys?" I asked in what I imagine is a somewhat quizzical voice.

"Yeah, dog boys".

With that they avert their attention from me and focus on the job at hand, being dog boys. I am not surprised by the scene that has played out before me. The use of the term "dog boys" surprises me, although the fact that they are running around being dogs does not. This is one area that Sam feels other teachers do not understand. Why shouldn't children be allowed to run around, doing whatever they want to do? Playing.

A lot of people... well they don't understand what the notion of play is all about. I think a lot of people have difficulty or would have difficulty allowing children to play if they haven't had some sort of kindergarten teacher training because they would see that they are not actually doing anything or that they are not actually earning their money. I don't know what the real reasons are, but I know that a lot of teachers are really scared of the four-year-old children. For example, you'll go into a lot of schools and you'll find that the phys ed teachers and the music teachers... the kindergarten children are the last ones that they'll ever put their hand up to work with. I don't know why because as far as I'm concerned they are easier to get on with. They are easier to manage. You have good and bad days, but in general you can control a group of kindergarten children more easily than you can control a group of grade six kids.

"Are you missing your mum still?"

Andrew nods, he is visibly distressed.

"If you have a look at the clock there is only about half an hour left and your mum will be back".

"Hey, Alex and Haley you know better than to be running inside".

"Hey, Sam is it library today?" Kevin calls out from across the room. Sam indicates that he needs to lower his voice while at the same time signalling that it is in fact the day to go to the library.

The "Dog Boys" have joined the others eating morning tea. There is something wrong with one of the computers, again. Sam fixes the problem.

"Jody your voice is louder than mine, calm down".

The "Dog Boys" have quietened down although they continue playing while they eat.

Sam calls a large group of children inside to get them ready for library. They are slow to return to the classroom. "Inside everyone".

"Inside everyone!" Kevin who is standing next to Sam yells, reinforcing the instruction given by Sam.

Andrew is crying again.
"What did mummy say? She said that she would be back before library. So there is no..."
Andrew continues to cry although Chloe has wriggled her way across the floor and is comforting him. She places her hand on his shoulder "It will be alright" she repeats in a slow soothing voice.

"Come on, there is still a bit of tidying up to be done". The children do the additional tidying and then come and sit back down on the floor. "Find a book and then come and sit down here".

"Eyes to me. Someone did this box work this morning and they didn't put their name on it". Sam is holding Eve's work although she does not seem to notice. Sam continues looking in her direction and she eventually realises that is the boat that she had made.

Andrew is still crying although he is looking at one of the three books that he has in front of him. Chloe who had been trying to comfort him holds his hand while they read. Sam moves over to comfort Andrew although it has done nothing to stop him crying.
"Mummy will be here in two secs".
"How do you know?"
"Because she said, remember. She said that she would be back before we went to library". Sam stands, "Okay people, can you finish reading your stories and then put them back on the shelf".

Sam starts to clap a pattern which is repeated by the rest of the class. This occurs for several minutes until the whole class has assembled on the mat. Sam begins to sing a song and the children join in "The Three Bears".

Andrew's mother has arrived.

"I think he was starting to doubt us" Sam comments to her as she sits down on the floor next to her son.
"NO" Kevin shouts as he is selected by Stephanie to be his partner for the short walk to the library.
"What, Stephanie is your very good friend".
"What" Kevin asks.
Sam has a look on his face that indicates to Kevin that he knows exactly what he is being told to do. Kevin responds with a wry grin and then looks away.

The children are dismissed in pairs to line up at the door. They make their way to the library and reassemble on the large mat situated in the middle of a number of bookshelves.

Sam explains to the class where they are able to choose books from in the library. "You need to leave the books over there alone. They are there for a special reason". Sam is referring to a display of books that Carly has all but demolished in a very short period of time.

Sam and Jasmine rummage through the pile of library bags that are strewn across the floor. Taking the children's books from the bags they place them on and remove the name cards from the back of the book. The process of finding a new book is a long and drawn out one for some of the children. The children look through the books, agonising over the decision, comparing several books only to place them all back on the shelves. They then move to another section of the library where the process is repeated.

As time passes more and more books have been changed in what looked like a carefully planned out exercise, even though it still took close to fifteen minutes. Sam reads the class a story and before long it is time to return to the classroom.

Several parents are waiting at the back of the classroom when we return from the library. The children are shown name cards and when they have identified their name they are able to go and get their bag. Several of the children make a short detour to say hello to a parent and then return to the mat.

"You need to put this work in your bag when I give it to you". Sam reminds the children as they are handed the work they have completed during the day.
"There's a special letter to give to your Mum or Dad".
"What" Kevin yells out.
"Your Mum or Dad will tell you what it is about".

Several more parents have now gathered at the back of the room. I am surprised to see four dads waiting to collect children. This has not been the case at other schools I have visited.

Eve shows her mother a painting that she has done. I notice that she is wearing bright red nail polish. Her mother sits near me. She is wearing a faded pair of tracksuit pants, a knitted jumper and a much-travelled pair of moccasins. She pulls the sleeve of her jumper down. As she does, she carefully studies me. I am dressed in a pair of black trousers and a polo shirt that probably cost too much. I imagine that she is wondering who I am and what I am doing siting toward the back of the classroom on one of the desks.

The children are dismissed. They say goodbye to Sam as they leave the classroom. Sam greets several of the parents as they enter the room.

Sam is now busy changing the puzzles over. I find myself wondering why the puzzles are placed in the large trolley; perhaps they are just being changed. The last of the children have been collected from the classroom. A silence falls on the room filling every spare space. The only sounds are those of Sam and Jasmine placing the few remaining puzzles on the trolley.

The computers have been covered with sheets of material and the room re-organised. "That's not what I would call a typical day in a kinder class". I am somewhat surprised by this statement. I am puzzled to say the least as the room, activities and going ons in the classroom appear the same as the other occasions that I have been in the room. Maybe Sam thought that it was necessary to say something about the events that had transpired, maybe it was the visit from the politician earlier. I am not sure what Sam meant by today not being typical although the typical was not

something that I expected to find. What I did want to find however was an understanding of Sam's work and what it means in this school.

The pre-start teacher has arrived (this explains the changing of puzzles and the inclusion of a number of toys and games that are suited to children much younger than kindergarten age). "Leave that" the pre-start teacher comments to Sam "I guarantee that there will be a bigger mess". Jasmine and the pre-start teacher have a conversation and talk about what they might do next week.

As the room is transformed to accommodate the needs of the younger children I watch Sam as he finishes tidying the remaining books on the shelf. Sam collects a cookbook and thumbs through the pages looking for a recipe that could be used in the kindergarten. Jasmine talks to Sam about what she has planned for the weekend. I am sitting at one of the tables, although I am there only long enough to finalise some of my notes. Walking toward the door I pause, I thank Sam and Jasmine once again for allowing me to visit the classroom and then say goodbye. As I slowly make my way from the classroom I can still hear Sam and Jasmine talking. I open the heavy door at the front of the building and walk through it. I hear the door close behind me. My mind beings to wander.

Chapter Six - Lucy

You're not just dealing with kids, I deal with, probably as much, with parents as I do with children, well not nearly, not as much, but a really big part of your job is working with parents and I really like that. The fact that you work so much with parents as well as the kids makes it very varied, which I like. I'd prefer that than just, if you've got a grade two or something it's really just, kids, kids, kids. I really like that.

I slowly drive past the school, scanning the rapidly filling street for a car park. Having located one, I check that the pen I have selected for the day will work, I always use a different pen for each day of data collection, I don't know why, I just do. I walk slowly up the street toward the school. A child and her mother walk just in front of me, talking about something that they had watched on television earlier that morning. I walk past several other parents, they look at me, probably wondering why I am walking toward the gate to the kindergarten. I smile and continue on my way, pausing momentarily to unlock the gate that leads to the kindergarten yard. The metal is cold, I fumble with the lock although another parent has arrived. I smile at the parent and child, leaving them to lock the gate.

I don't see her at first but I can hear her voice. She is bent over, speaking in a voice that is barely audible over the busy hum that fills the room. Jim is crying, tears running down across his red cheeks. Lucy's head is level with his
"What's wrong?"
"I forgot my toys".
"Well that's okay".
"No it's not, no one will play with me".

"Look at all this - I wonder what you will be doing today?" one of the parents comments to her child as she drops her off.

I first met Lucy in 1999 when I was on Internship. I was placed at Veracity Primary School for seven weeks. I had been placed on a prep class and Lucy was teaching

next door in the kindergarten. I learnt a lot from Lucy during that time despite the fact that she was not my supervising teacher. I had asked her about the planning she did and how she set it out. She did not hesitate to share this with me, along with several other aspects of teaching in an early childhood environment.

"Hello stranger" were the first words that Lucy spoke to me when I arrived in the kindergarten playground. "You know how people always show up out of the blue when they want something" I commented to her before proceeding to outline what I had planned for the study.

Alex, a tall boy with short blonde hair that sits messily on top of his head, approaches Lucy and Jim. "You can use one of my action Mans".
Jim smiles and reluctantly reaches out to receive an action man that is decked out in scuba diving gear, complete with goggles. He moves to join another group of boys who are standing near the block construction area.

Belinda, Lucy's assistant, walks past each of the groups that have formed in the classroom saying hello. Two older girls in the classroom, from grade 5 or 6 I guess, drop off younger brothers and sisters.

Contact with another adult is something that does not present itself on a regular basis in primary classrooms. Having a full time kindergarten assistant was something that Lucy relished.

I really like working with another adult. I find teaching in a classroom on your own all day, quite isolating. I quite like having my aide there and, and in a kindergarten there are always people in and out. You know, things are always different, things are always changing and it's relaxed.

Working with a kindergarten assistant was not something that Lucy always liked the thought of during her initial year of teaching kindergarten.

I think I always found kindergarten aides a bit daunting, because they were always a bit older and always seemed very experienced and very bossy (laughs). And um, I found them a bit intimidating I think.

I was really lucky [during] my first year on a kinder. I had a young girl as my aide. She had children of her own but she was sort of my age and that was really nice. But I know the aide next door was one of those sort of really old fashioned kindergarten aides that had been there for 50 years and, you know if you changed the way you cut up your bananas you were in trouble (laughs).

Nicole has arrived; her grandfather has dropped her off. She sits down in the construction area after hanging her bag on the hook. She gets out a box that contains some large plastic numbers. "One, two, three" she counts as she puts the cards in order. She then places the correct number of bears on top of each of the cards. Lucy is on the phone. Several more children arrive.

A small group of children are playing outside on some of the equipment. Lucy, having finished her phone conversation, mixes a small amount of dye with some water in the bottom of a large tub that is used for water play. She continues to walk back and forth from the sink to the tub.

The groundsman appears from around the side of the kindergarten building. He apologises to Lucy for not having the sandpit cover unlocked and off the sandpit when the children arrive. Lucy assures him that there was no problem with that and then moves off to find one of the children's pieces of work that has been misplaced.

"I'm five!" Kate, a girl with blonde pigtails and both front teeth missing tells me as she walks into the classroom. She continues telling any one else who will listen to her story. Her mother, who is carrying a large plastic container, accompanies her. I assume that the contents are a birthday cake for her daughter.
"I'll be back at lunchtime".

Lucy re-organises the tables, as the cleaner did not put them back in the right place. The phone in Lucy's office is ringing again. She disappears momentarily, returns, this time setting up the outdoor activities. Jim, Albert and Brett are standing at the top of the slide, talking about the rules of a game that they are organising while Belinda finishes filling the water play tub with water.

I first entered Lucy's classroom three years ago and while it has changed location to the room next door, little has changed in terms of the way the room is set out.

Lucy had not always wanted to be a teacher. In fact, the only initial thought that Lucy had about teaching was that she did not want to be one. She had started a degree at university and during the holidays she went to visit her sister.

My older sister was a teacher - she got out of the rat race, sensible girl. She was teaching, when I was at uni. She was teaching up the East Coast at Knoxridge. I'm not going to be a teacher, you know. I went up and stayed with her when my exams finished. She was a high school teacher, and she said "look, do you want to spend some time in some classrooms?" Well, I had to do something so I did. I spent quite a bit of time in some early childhood classes and just thought oh, yeah I could do this.

How things change. After spending time in early childhood classrooms Lucy began thinking about becoming a teacher, the idea of a studentship made teaching as a career more appealing.

Studentship money would be good (laughs); yeah I could do this for a couple of years. I guess I was really lucky, I just fell into something that I really loved doing and it was - just like pure coincidence.

Lucy undertook teacher training and in 1981, she began teaching in a country school.

I taught two years at Barraville as a first year out teacher. There were four first year out teachers, a second year out and a third year out, I think, and the principal (laughs). So, that was interesting.

Then I had a year at South Barclay. I had two years at Beety primary in Standale, which is like East Ryde. That was hard work but good though. Then I had two years at Junction District High, which was wonderful. Then I went back up here and I had six years at Jayline and this is my third year here. So, I've had quite a range.

Parents continue dropping off their children. "Is it banking today?" Craig asks his mother. She does not seem to hear him; instead she has focused her attention on changing his home reader. Lucy has returned, and Craig's mother questions her about the previous book, indicating that it was too hard for him.
"Why do you say that?" Lucy asks. Craig's mother explains the difficulty that he has had with the book and both she and Lucy rummage through the books to find one that is more suitable.

Kindergarten classrooms are usually separate from those of the rest of the school. This was no different for Lucy, although her classroom was a little bit different. The

red brick building that the kindergarten classroom was situated in also had a prep classroom. I felt that Lucy had considered kindergarten teaching to be an isolating experience because the classroom was often separated from the rest of the school, usually with a fence around it so that it was both visually and physically separate.

I think it's a very isolating job. You can be very isolated because so often your buildings not even part of the school. This is nice here, because you've got a different class next door. When I taught in Protégé, oh, you were down in the paddock, literally, and no one came near you. I think probably the biggest thing [associated with teaching kindergarten] would be it's a very diverse job and nobody - unless you've done it - you have absolutely no idea just how diverse it is, and how many skills you need. And I think the biggest thing is the people skills, not just the kids but the parents and all the people that you have to deal with. And, and the other staff, and I think that is a big issue for kindergarten teachers, knowing that nobody really knows or understands what you're doing because you're sort of the - you're a "one off" in the school.

Some of the mothers seem to do everything for the children, get their fruit out, put their bags, coats and other belongings on their hooks. Several other parents have arrived with home readers. Lucy greets each of the children and their parents as they arrive. In most instances Lucy uses each parent's name, if not, she looks them in the eyes and greets them. Lucy is also able to recall the names of brothers and sisters of the children whom she teaches.

Several of the children find themselves something to do inside although most of the children hang their bags at the back of the room and then return outside. "Tell me again", Lucy asks Grace who is telling her something that was difficult to understand the first time.

Lucy has finishes her conversation with Grace and then makes her way to the storeroom. "We do box work when the storeroom gets too full", Lucy jokes to me as she rummages around in the back of the storeroom, getting large cardboard boxes, post tubes and other treasures. Large selections of materials are placed on one of the tables. With that done, Lucy then collects a number of plaster animals that the children painted yesterday with their buddies. Most of them had stuck to the paper because they had painted the underside of their paws, despite being told not to.

"He's alright", Lucy comments to one of the parents who had begun to reprimand one of her younger children for tipping out the contents of one of the large baskets that contained Duplo. Lucy values the contact that she has with parents, and in some cases she also has contact with the younger brothers and sisters of the children she teaches.

I think other early childhood class teachers do have a fairly big impact on families and can help parents. But not to the extent that the kindergarten teachers do, because they're in and out twice a day. You know, it's like as they get older, families aren't in the classrooms as much. We get all the babies in the prams and the toddlers and I'm often asked questions about babies and toddlers as much as I am about - they run things by me, about teething and toilet training.

"Good morning" several mothers comment as a fourth parent joins them. The group of mothers stand at the back of the room talking about what their children had been doing. The sun is out, a complete contrast to yesterday.

Lucy is talking to one of the parents about her youngest child's development. It is evident from yesterday that Lucy is able to talk to parents about a variety of issues and often her experience as a mother is the basis of her advice.

One characteristic of kindergarten teachers' work that Lucy referred to a number of times during each of the interviews was the work that kindergarten teachers do with parents. Becoming a parent herself was also something that Lucy felt added to her development as a kindergarten teacher.

Becoming a parent I think has had a huge bearing on my teaching, especially with kindergarten. I think parents knowing that you're a parent too, makes a big difference. I wasn't a bad teacher when I wasn't a parent but I think I can empathise a lot more with parents and I think I'm much better now at seeing things from parents' point of view. You know, they used to come in and I can remember thinking oh, you know, what's this woman carrying on about - now I know (laughs). Parents worry about their children, until you're a parent you don't really understand that. Well, you understand but not, not really, not properly I don't think. So I think that has made me a lot - I think that it's made my relationships with parents a lot better. I think that it's made me understand children, the personal things about children. I can remember until I had my own children the importance of when that first tooth that falls out, or you know, just little things like that. You just don't realise, they are just so important to children. So, I think that's had a big bearing on it.

Most of the children are now playing outside. Another parent has approached Lucy and is talking to her about a recipe for cordial that the children had made on a previous occasion. Another mother arrives, carrying her son's bag. She stops, opens the bag, places the fruit in the bowl and then goes and hangs up the bag while her son trails along behind her.

Several of the children study me. It is clear that they wonder who I am and what I am doing in their classroom.
"Look what I've got!"
"What have you got?" I enquire,
"A trophy".

A parent is talking to Belinda about a puzzle that she did not want any more and she was going to give to the kindergarten. While she talks with Belinda she shuffles through a number of birthday invitations, handing them out to the respective parents as they arrive with their child. Occasionally they are handed to the children themselves.

While the parents stand at the back of the room talking to one another as well as Lucy when she passes within earshot, their children who are not yet at kindergarten age hover around their legs or explore the exciting resources that the kindergarten classroom has to offer.

"I'll just get my clipboard". Lucy goes to her office and returns with the clipboard. I assume that the clipboard contains information pertaining to a question that one of the parents had asked.

A large carpet mat is spread out on the blue, grey carpet that covers most of the room, with the exception of a metre or so wide strip of lino that runs the length of one wall of the classroom forming the wet area. The squeal of brakes interrupts the noise in the room and disappears as suddenly as it came. A group of boys drive cars along the streets woven into the carpet mat making car noises to accompany the movement of the cars as they travel the congested streets.

"Did you find those cars in the storeroom boys?" The children are not supposed to go into the storeroom, although they say that they had taken them from the storeroom. Lucy looks somewhat bemused by their honesty.
"You look very nice in that skirt", Lucy comments to Grace who is wearing a short blue skirt that is covered in metallic blue sequins. With the dress ups out, plus a new suitcase full of them, most of the girls are finding something new to wear.
"Amanda, that is a nice dressing gown, although would you be wearing it at the café?"
She takes it off and then returns wearing a long black dress, white shawl and a scarf. One of the parents who had overheard Lucy talking about the cash register offers to lend the children a toy cash register that she has at home.

Rachel and Kachina walk around the room holding hands, talking to those who cross their path. They pause momentarily at each of the activities that they encounter and then move on. Settling down at the construction area they begin to play, although they have ensured that there is adequate distance between them and the group of boys who are playing with similar equipment.

"Oh I was hoping that you were going to come today" Lucy comments as she moves across the room to greet a parent and her child. The parent and child smile warmly. "Let's see if we can find you a spot for your bag". Madeline nods nervously as she accompanies Lucy to the back of the classroom.

"Did you come in by yourself today?" Lucy asks Nathan who is standing near the back of the room, studying one of the toy cars he is holding.
"No, Pop took me in his blue car".

"I think that's a game for outside". Lucy pauses at another group of children who are throwing a miniature football from one side of the room to the other. "Do you want to go and have a quick run?". The children nod and before Lucy has time to add, "Remember to come back inside when the bell goes" they have already got their hats from the hook above their bags and are gone. The children continue engaging with a variety of activities set out for when they arrive at school. A fruit bowl sits on the last table in the wet area, the one closest to the door. Each child places a piece of fruit in

the bowl as they arrive. Drew, who appears smaller than the others follows his mother into the classroom. She opens his bag, places the fruit in the bowl and then takes his bag to the back of the room and hangs it up. He has already left her, after finding his friends. He shows them a number of recently acquired toys, housed in an old shoebox.

The bell has gone, although no one appears to have noticed. They continue with the important tasks at hand. Several minutes pass and a second bell rings. This time it is Lucy who has control of when the bell rings. She holds the small brass bell and rings it several times. The children are slow to finish what they are doing, moving in ebbs and flows they make their way to the mat and sit. The room has quietened considerably, small pockets of conversation can be heard while the children wait on the mat for Lucy.

Lucy makes her way from the side of the room and takes her seat in front of the class. They fall silent, hanging on her every word. Another parent has arrived, escorting her son to the back of the room and watching him hang his bag on the hook. "James how are you? I didn't see you arrive today".
"My second name is Nathan".
"I didn't know that".
Lucy continues taking the attendance, talking to each of the children. Topics of conversation range from what they have been doing to how a brother or sister are.

Brett has lost his new school jumper after having it for only one day "We will have to look for that later". This has lead several of the children to talk about their jumpers and where they are.
"It's going to be a quiet day today because Brian is away" Lucy comments "but we will miss him". Several of the children also agree with this.

I would describe Lucy as an experienced teacher. She has been teaching for twenty years with the majority of this time being spent in the lower levels of the early childhood range.

I've never taught over grade one. I hate to say that I've never even had a grade two (laughs). So yeah I've always taught kinder, prep, or grade one. I've never had a

straight one, I've always had a prep one. It doesn't worry me, it's the area that I really like. I'm not really particularly interested in teaching other areas, other age groups. I had had four years on other early childhood classes. Then, before that I had two, three, four years, not consecutive, because I'd had babies and things in between - so, on and off for 10 years, or more. It's a bit hard to remember now (laughs). I think first, the year that I had the kinder / prep would have been eighty-eight, yeah eighty-eight, that was my first year on a kinder.

Teaching in a kindergarten environment was not something that Lucy had actively sought.

One year they needed someone for a kinder/prep and, so I did it. I realised then that I really liked working with kindergarten children. By then, I had children of my own; it was the perfect part-time job because you can just have one group. You don't have to teach with someone and try and negotiate all that stuff people do when they work together. I did a few years on and off with kinder, but yeah, it's what I prefer to do.

With the attendance complete Lucy continues asking the children questions.
"That means that we should have 19 children plus one today, how many does that make?"
"The same amount as the other day" comments Nicole who is practically sitting on Lucy's feet.
"Twenty, there should be twenty children here today. No, we've blown it when the teacher counts and finds out that there are only 19. Did everyone have a good weekend?"
"Yes" the class chorus enthusiastically.

"Sorry we're late"
"It doesn't matter if you are late at kinder, in fact we're not usually sitting down at this time", Lucy comments to a parent who has arrived with a pre-kinder child. Lucy stands from her chair and moves toward the parent. Benjamin looks around the classroom nervously. Lucy talks to Benjamin and his mother for a minute, ensuring they know what they are doing.

Working with parents and members of the wider community is another important role that Lucy identified as being part of kindergarten teachers' work.

A really big role for kindergarten teachers is working with parents and with the wider community. It is the first port of call for all families when they start school

and um, that's really important in terms of the school community. If they have a really good experience at kindergarten they will stay at the school. The next child will come, the cousins come, the neighbours come you know, that's a really, really big issue I think. And I quite like that role, I enjoy that, unless you have parents like I had to deal with today, who, it wouldn't matter what you did they wouldn't be happy, but everyone gets those.

Introducing parents to school and introducing them to school culture is only one aspect of the work that Lucy undertakes with parents. On occasions she has been called on to provide families or individual parents with help, guidance or support.

I don't think they [other teachers working with older children] have any inkling of the sort of social issues that we deal with and the very delicate family issues that come up, that we deal with. I had a parent this year, I had taught her son a couple of years ago and her little girl's in playgroup. At playgroup this year - turned out after she was just chatting to me one day that she [the mother] has that obsessive compulsive disorder, she really only worked it out, through talking to me about the things that she was concerned about her daughter starting school. So what we did was got her to see a social worker. She's now had some counselling. She's just a different woman, which means that the little girl is a different child all together. She doesn't look so worried. We deal with stuff like that quite often.

Lucy was adamant that primary teachers do not understand the types of family matters that kindergarten teachers are required to tend to.

Now, those people up there [teachers in the main school] haven't got a clue They have no idea of those sorts of things that we do, not just for children but for families. We're dealing with family issues a lot of the time. And a lot, for example, you're out there chatting about you know - when the baby's going to start walking and you know toilet training and so you're doing - even though you've got four and five year olds in your class, you're talking to parents all the time about their babies and their toddlers. So I think that a lot of people don't understand [that].

I had been looking in the direction of the parent help roster at the back of the room, Lucy must have noticed this, "Our parent help roster is looking very bare. Does anyone have any spare time? We would love a visit" Lucy comments, looking in the direction of several parents who are still hovering around at the edge of the room. They smile politely as Lucy continues a conversation with one of the children.

Several of the children begin to call out while Lucy is telling the class about what she had been doing on the weekend. She continues talking, placing her index finger up to her lips, signalling the children to be quiet. "It's our sharing day today. If you have

something to share then quietly go and get it from your bag". Most of the class are now at the back of the room rummaging through their bags in a desperate bid to find something to share. Several minutes pass and there is a line of children standing with their treasures firmly in hand. "No Matthew, it is Jane's turn".
"We'll just have to wait until everyone is quiet so that we can hear".
"Now Jane has something very special". Jane holds a large brown teddy bear that has a bright red ribbon tied around its neck.
"I didn't wet the bed that's why I got it".
"For how long?"
"For 14 nights".
The class gives her a clap.
"Luke didn't clap".
"That's alright, the rest of us did".
There are several large paintings of what I assume are daffodils hanging on the wall above the sinks. Belinda, the teacher's assistant, stands at the end of the bench in front of a small stove with a hotplate on top of it, cooking play dough. "I'm never going to the show" James calls out to no one in particular.
"Does anyone know what these are?" Lucy asks the children as she holds part of the plant up for the class to see. Blank faces are directed toward Lucy as she provides additional information and clues. "They are sea pods" Lucy informs the class.
"Whatever they are" Luke adds.
"We will very quickly do the last few people who have something to share".

"I think I know why Kate is standing up here".
"It's my birthday and I'm five".
"Happy Birthday. You'd better come up here".
Kate stands at the front of the room while Lucy moves from her chair to sit behind the piano. "I'd better get my Birthday music out hadn't I?" Lucy looks for the music.
"Happy Birthday to Kate" Luke sings by himself while Lucy continues to look for the music.

With the music sitting in front of Lucy on the piano she begins to play. The class sing "Happy Birthday" while Kate stands next to the piano smiling. She has a large round sticker with the words "Happy Birthday" on it.

One birthday that stands out in Lucy's mind was her own 40th birthday. Lucy mentioned that turning forty was an important aspect of her life. This milestone was something that had served to shape her life not just personally, but also professionally.

When I reached 40 a couple of years ago, I think I looked and I thought oh god, Lucy. You've been doing the same thing for 20 years, how could you? I looked at everyone around me, friends who do different jobs who have gone on and done all these wonderful things and people that I know that are younger than me that are now senior staff members. And I think, oh - I went through a real stage of thinking, I can't do this until I'm 65. I'll pretend to do it as I'm 65, you know, I just don't think that I can keep doing this for ever, I've got to do something else.

Lucy felt that she was ready for a change. She had been at a school for what she felt was too long and this thought was one catalyst for a change of scenery.

I was not very happy and I went through a very large soul-searching time about what I do and why do I do it. In the end, I think coming here probably helped that, in the end I just thought I really like my job, and does it really matter if everyone else around me is gone on to different things and retrained and dah, dada, dada. I really like doing what I do. I believe that I do it well and I get feedback from other people that I do - that I do it well as well. So, who cares, you know, I don't know if that's just a middle aged thing, where you know you get to a stage in your life where you think what have I done, where have I gone, where do I want to get before it's all over, you know, your working life, you know. I do - I just - I just really like doing what I do.

Lucy had resolved a number of issues surrounding her work. In particular, that she really enjoyed doing what she was doing, teaching kindergarten. During this time of soul-searching Lucy also contemplated the contact that she had with children and her sense of belonging in the classroom. This had not been a simple process.

I think that it takes you a long time to get to that stage. It's taken me a long time to get to the stage where I can actually say that I'm really happy doing what I'm doing and I don't feel that I need to go on and do anything else to feel that I'm doing something worthwhile. I have no, absolutely no interest in being a senior staff member at all. I couldn't think of anything worse. They don't work with kids, and when they do, all they do is work with horrible ones. I just - I just love doing what I'm doing.

"We've got a few different jobs to do today. Put your sharing things away and then I will show you what we have to do today".

The children return their things to their bags and then sit back down on the floor.
"You know that teddy bear stamping that we've been playing with?"
"Yes" most of the children answer in unison.
"Well the playing's over". Lucy goes on to explain that they will be using the stamps for an activity where the children need to place the correct number of stamps in a grid. "Do you think that you could get nine bears in there?" pointing to the square that contains the number nine. The children respond with a range of answers. Lucy then explains that they are able to choose the sheet that they think will not be too easy or too hard for them.
"What would be the first thing that you would do?"
"Get a sheet".
"Well after you have got a sheet",
"Get the stamps".
Lucy laughs at the conversation that had transpired between her and a number of the children, causing several of the children to laugh as well. "No, put your name on the sheet".

One of the main rewards of being a kindergarten teacher for Lucy, along with watching the children's and their parents' development during the year is being able to have a laugh with them.

I think if you stopped laughing with kids - if you stopped seeing the funny side of what kids say to you, then you'd have to get out, very quickly because that's the - that's the buzz for me, the fact that every day you come to school and you have a good laugh. The kids are just so gorgeous that you can, have a laugh, not at them but with them, you know. I think that's the beauty of it, you know.

"Now, you might do the first sheet and think that was too easy and then do a harder one. The next thing that we are going to do is box construction".
Several of the children have started to become restless and move around on the floor.
"Children, I know that we have been sitting down for a long time. There are a few more jobs to explain. Who remembers the rule about glue and sticky tape when we do box construction?"
Several of the children recite the rules. Lucy smiles and nods in agreement.
"Did we have any thoughts about cooking today Mrs Jane?"

She nods and then Lucy goes on to explain what the children have to do at each of the activities.

The relaxed nature of the day was also another attractive component of teaching in kindergarten.

It's not easy, but it's a nice relaxed atmosphere. If it's a nice day you go outside. If it's not a nice day you stay inside. If you feel like cooking you cook. I like that, just that nice relaxed thing about kinder.

Benjamin stands up and begins walking to one of the tables. "Benjamin, while we are sitting on the mat we need to be listening for a moment".
"I have to do my picture".
"Which picture is that?"
Benjamin explains the picture although the explanation is ignored because Lucy has moved on. Having realised this, Benjamin makes his way back to the mat.

"We do need some rules about how many shopkeepers we need. Would everyone look this way please? Who would like to be the shop keeper?" All of the children raise their hands and there are sighs of disappointment when the two shopkeepers are selected. "Remember what I say about kindergarten, no one misses out". Allan has tears welling up in his eyes because he was not able to have a turn at being a shopkeeper. Lucy then moves on to explain another of the jobs that have been planned for the day, a sun activity. "Collage the - you know what collage is don't you?" in reference to an activity in which the children are required to collage a cut out of a sun.
"Gluing" several of the children call out.

"What are you doing?" Madeline asks me.
"I am writing down all of the different things that you and Mrs Clark do while you are at school".

Lucy's voice pierces the noise that has filled the room.
"Who wanted to do box construction?"

No one has shown any interest in the box construction. "Someone asked me" Lucy comments to herself.

The children move to their selected tasks. As they complete their work, Lucy provides them with encouragement and praise. "Would anyone like to do box construction?" There does not appear to be any interest in box construction at this time.

Even though the children whom Lucy teaches are young, she believes that they are able to take some responsibility for their own learning. This dictates to a certain extent the type of program that she offers.

I think at this age children know what they need and choose for themselves; not always, but I think you have to offer a program, which those sorts of children can take out of it what they need.

Rachel and Jessica have attached themselves to Lucy and lead her over to the puzzle that they have completed. Lucy inspects the puzzle, praising the children for their efforts. She then moves to work with Kate at one of four learning centres in the classroom.
"Do you know what that one is?" Lucy asks Kate in reference to a letter "A" that is written on a small white card. Lucy likes to work with the children one to one at various times during the day although she is not always sure if this is what the children want to be doing.

I tend to feel that it's got to be if the children want to do it, nine times out of ten they don't.

Most of the children have completed the activities that have been assigned for the morning.

I had asked Lucy to describe what kindergarten teaching was like for her. Overall, it was a positive assessment although this is not always the case.

Well today, I would say bloody frustrating, but mostly I would say that it was wonderful. I love it.

Lucy was particularly honest in her appraisal of what it is like to be a kindergarten teacher. On many occasions other people, be they teachers or members of the wider community, do not seem to appreciate what being a kindergarten teacher or their work involves.

It's hard work; I think a lot of people don't think that it's hard work. I think a lot of people think that we just play down here. We joke about that a lot. I joke - I quite often say "we're just down in kindergarten playing, don't worry about us".

With the set activities completed they have the freedom to choose what they would like to do. Jane who is working at the box construction begins to sing a "High 5" song while she works. I must have been here for too long if I know where the song is from.

"Go easy on that sticky tape won't you?" Lucy comments to Grace who has torn off at least half a metre of tape as she makes her way back to the bear stamping activity.
"Good boy. That's excellent. Let's count these". Together Lucy and Ross count
"1, 2, 3, 4, 5".
"What number do we have here?"
Ross just looks blankly in the direction of the sheet.
"What about number four, can you count those for me?"

"I have finished".
"Good boy Steven!"
"Would you like to..." A child calling out interrupts Lucy.
"Benjamin took that roller off me".
"Well look at it like this. Benjamin is our special visitor today, would it matter if he used it today?"
Bill agrees more or less with what Lucy had said and finds something else to smooth the large ball of play dough that he has in front of him.

"Samuel can I have that? I might put that in your special folder".
"How are you going there Ross?"
"Good".
"That's excellent".

Lucy moves inside and gathers up a number of completed suns and pegs them out on a clotheshorse so that they will dry more quickly. This will enable the children to start sticking paper and other things on to them.

I stand near Benjamin (one of the pre-kinder children), watching him play with some toy cars. Lucy has returned from outside and approaches me.
"He wanted to play with his cars" she comments to me as Benjamin sits on the carpet driving one of many toy cars around in circles.
"He's not ready for much else".

Lucy highlights the importance of the needs of individual children in her teaching and she endeavours to provide each child with the experiences that he/she needs.

For example, Benjamin, all he does all day is play with his cars, and if he can do it by sharing and talking and cooperating then he's had a good day. Whereas, a child say like Emily, she needs more than that so she gets more.

"You fell in the water", Albert comments to Jim who had fallen on to the carpet mat while attempting to walk across a wooden ladder suspended between two wooden frames.
"I'll blast that lava".
Albert and Jim are joined by Brett on the ladder before they scurry off across some steps and then crawl through a plastic tunnel. A mother is talking to some of the children who are playing on one of the slides while she pushes another child on the swing.

"You're dead".
"No I'm not, I'm too strong".
The boys who had been playing on the circuit equipment move from there and begin riding the bikes around as fast as possible.

Benjamin and Steven, who are wearing red plastic smocks, play with bright purple liquid. They have access to a large number of cups, buckets and a variety of other containers that they use to pour the water from one to the other.

The group of girls, who had been playing on the slide temporarily, are now using the circuit. The mother who is at kinder for parent help walks around each of the activities talking to the children.

Lucy tries to offer the children an indoor and outdoor program that allows them to choose between being in the classroom and undertaking experiences outside of the classroom in the kindergarten playground. This is difficult at times because of duty of care and the fact that she (or another adult) must be able to see the children at all times. Not having a large kindergarten yard is another problem that Lucy must consider when planning for the outdoor program.

I think we are probably lucky here because we can run a better indoor / outdoor program than a lot of other schools, but then on the other hand we haven't got a lovely big kinder yard that we can go out and set up a whole lot of really nice climbing things and that sort of stuff. So, I suppose there's fors and againsts. But, I really like to run an indoor / outdoor program as much as I can. I think it's nice for the kids to have the choice to be in or out. I think there are times when you need to be all outside and there are times when you need, all to be inside.

Rachel and Jessica are trying to balance a large plastic triangle on top of two large rectangular blocks. "We did the job" Rachel comments.
"This is our house" Jessica informs me, aware that I am watching what they are doing. The children continue adding various parts to the house.

Lucy has found that it is not always easy to juggle all of the roles associated with being a kindergarten teacher. There are a number of different roles Lucy must perform in the classroom, at times she wonders where the line can be drawn separating her role from that of others.

For example, today you know I spent half an hour discussing toilet training for Mandy. I mean, I don't really see that as, (pause) I think it's part of my role but I don't feel that I have a lot of expertise in that area. Do I think that's part of my role? I suppose, to support is my role there. I don't think that I should be toilet training children though; I really don't think that's my job.

The role of a kindergarten teacher is somewhat open to interpretation, even Lucy is unclear about some of the roles that she is called on to adopt. There is however one

role that Lucy describes as being her main role, although even this takes some reflection and time to put into words.

I think my main role is - I think my main role is introducing children to school, getting them ready for more formal education, introducing parents to school (laughs), getting them ready for more formal education (laughs). I think the social skills, teaching children to share and cooperate and work together and take turns and all those things, are probably the most important things that I do. I think that's my main role, but also to treat them as individuals and teach them at the stage that they are at.

"No, you be the big sister".

"You can both be the babies".

"Can I put the door up please?"

"I'm the mummy".

"Why don't you be my mum and I can be your mum".

"I can be the mum and you can be the dad".

"No!"

Jessica begins to cry like a baby.

"Two can be stepsisters and I can be Cinderella".

"If you wet anyone with that then I will have to take it away from you. Do you understand?" Lucy comments to Benjamin who is working at the water play and was looking like he may tip a small bucket of water on one of the other children working nearby. He smiles sheepishly and then tips the water back in the tub. Despite wearing an apron, he manages to send the water cascading down the front of his shorts as it narrowly misses the edge of the tub. A child sits in the middle of a large plastic tunnel. Several children roll it back and forth much to the audible delight of the child who is in the tunnel.

Two boys, who appear to be in grade five or six arrive in the classroom. "Would it be okay if we borrow your stereo?"

"Yes, but just make sure that I get it back before lunch".

Madeline walks around the room with a number of play dough shapes on an ice cream lid. "Can I have a taste?" Lucy asks.

"Yes".

Lucy pretends to have a taste of the treats that are on offer. "They're delicious!" Madeline smiles at the compliment she had received.

Albert, Jim and Brett ride the bikes around the yard. As they get on them they pretend to kick start them in a manner similar to that of a motorbike. As they ride the bikes an accompaniment of motorbike noises can be heard. Another two boys join them although there are not enough bikes so they just look on, patiently waiting for their turn.

"What happened?" Jim enquires as one of the bikes is taken out of service.
"The tyre's wearing out because people brake really fast and skid" Lucy comments.
"Look what he done". Jim shows me the damage that has been done to the bike tyre.

I am watching Loris and Nicole as they play outside.
"We're being friends aren't we?"

Lucy is talking to me about the value of the large blocks. When she arrived at the school they were not being used, instead they were gathering dust in the back of one of the school's storage sheds. Lucy moves off to check whether there was a disturbance amongst a group of children "You have to ask if you want to play". I turn my attention to the children who are playing with the large plastic blocks.

"No "Baby Borns" allowed on the boat!"
"The motor isn't going".
Ross and James move to the back of the boat and begin to fix the motor at a furious pace. The motor in this instance is a large yellow triangle that is positioned at the back of several rectangular blocks, forming the hull of the boat.
"Let's go and get those sharks".
"We've got a shark".
The boys have picked up both of the wooden seesaws that were off to the port side of their boat. Placing them next to the boat, they reboard momentarily before they have another shark to land.
"What are you going to do with the sharks?" Lucy enquires.
"Kill them and eat them" Ross adds in an enthusiastic tone.

They place the second shark on the starboard side and reboard the boat.

"What are they?" Madeline asks as she hugs the "Baby Born".

"Sharks!"

"Quick boys on the boat", the captain announces. "We have to turn because we are about to crash".

At this point Lucy has returned "You are sharing the captaincy around here aren't you?"

"Yes" the boys chorus.

"The boat's sinking".

"Have you got any life boats?" Lucy asks.

"Yeah, we've got jet skis".

The sharks have readily lent themselves to being used as jet skis. Sitting on the see saws the boys begin making noises that vary between the sound a boat would make and that of a motorbike, as they move away from the sinking vessel.

Madeline and the "baby born" approach.

"That was our boat, but it's sinking".

"Anyway I'm a mermaid" Madeline informs the boys

"It's sinking".

"No, I'm a mermaid so I can swim". She jumps around on the boat and in the water.

"Let's build a house" Madeline suggests.

The boys dismantle the boat and begin the house construction while the mermaid continues moving around the large carpet mat making swimming noises. She stops swimming and picks up the "Baby Born" and moves several of the blocks around while explaining to the baby what she is doing.

"Can I play?" Loris enquires.

"Yeah, we're building a house".

"Yeah, that's where the baby can go" Loris places the doll in the centre of the house.

"There's a shark in there. Your baby, she's drowning".

"We need to go across the river" with that Madeline rescues the baby and runs across the ladder and returns to the house.

"I'm safe".

I shift my attention from the children playing with the blocks back to Lucy. She continues to provide a group of children with a number of alternatives until they choose an acceptable course of action.
"We're Buzz Light Years, do you want to play too?"
The same group of children continue the game that they had started earlier with the exception of the new buzz light year that was asked to join them.

Mr Charles, the assistant principal enters the classroom and mentions to Lucy that some work is being completed in the playground. He asks her to tell the children to stay away from that area.
"You'll need a bigger pad" he comments to me as he walks past.

There was a time when the kindergarten and early childhood section of the school had its own members of senior staff in the form of Infant Mistresses. Lucy regrets the demise of the infant mistress who was once in charge of the early childhood section of a school.

We don't have them anymore and I think it's a great shame that we don't. I think there are too many schools that don't have early childhood senior staff and I think that, like - we're very lucky here because we do.

The importance of having senior staff members who have an understanding of early childhood was made apparent to Lucy when a new principal arrived at one of the schools she taught in.

We got a new principal, in my second year there. He used to say to me "Lucy, just remind me what comes first kindergarten or prep?" So if you'd gone into a school like that without any experience, you'd be cactus.

As Lucy described June Sumner, an infant mistress that she met while on her first kindergarten placement she had a broad smile on her face. I got the feeling that Lucy was and perhaps still is very fond of June.

I was really lucky when I started, my first year on a kinder was when I was at Protégé primary and that was back in the good old days when you had an infant mistress. My infant mistress was a wonderful lady called June Sumner. She was older, well she seemed old then. I suppose because I was quite young. She was probably 40. She seemed old when I was 26. She was one of those - she was a real

infant mistress you know. She wasn't married. She didn't have children. She was very dedicated. She lived for her job. She took on people that she believed were doing the right thing - doing it - probably doing it the way she liked it being done. Thank goodness that I was one of them. She was wonderful to me. She was the one that actually offered me the kinder job, because I think she saw that I needed to sort of spread my wings a bit and do something a bit different.

Lucy attributes her commitment and passion for kindergarten teaching and the education of kindergarten aged children to June.

I think that she was probably the person who got me really passionate about everything to do with teaching and I owe her a great debt I think because she really, she believed in me. When I worked with June she was - I think that everybody needs someone like that. You could go to her and she'd help you or she'd roll in one morning and say, "try this" or "would you like this?" or you know. Yeah, I think that it was then that I really realised that I'd, I'd really picked the right job. Somewhere along the line I think that everyone needs a June Sumner (laughs). You are very lucky if you find someone. I think a lot of people do, somewhere, but I think these days without - for early childhood especially kinder and prep - without the good old infant mistresses it's very hard to have someone like that.

"Allan, you've forgotten our block rule. How high should they be?"
The children have built a tower that is easily taller than they are.
"Once the blocks fell and hit me right there, on the back" Allan informs me as Bill and Luke begin to dismantle the tower.
"How did that happen?"
"Well we built this castle and then" Allan demonstrates what had happened and the story ends with him holding his back and writhing around on the floor feigning pain.

Lucy indicates that it is time for the session to come to a close by ringing the small brass bell several times.
"Bill, did you hear the bell?"
"Yeah" the child responds is an unenthusiastic manner. He slowly begins to pack the blocks away on the shelf that runs down one side of the alcove in which the bags are hung.

"Right, everyone on the mat. Girls you need to take off your dress ups. Would you like me to undo that?"
Lucy helps Kate undo the top button of a dress that she is wearing, but not before the child had attempted to do it for herself.

There are some plants growing in milk cartons that have been cut in half at the back of the room. They look like beans although I am not sure. Belinda is peeling a variety of fruits for morning tea, while the children are seated on the mat.
"Hands on knees, hands on shoulders, hands on heads" Lucy gets the children's attention. Lucy sits on her chair next to the piano. On her right is an easel. Three big books sit on the small shelf that runs along the bottom of the easel. The attendance book also sits on the shelf.

"Jessica, just hurry up in there please". Lucy is holding one of the checklists that had been placed next to the learning centre. "Some people used this list today. When you do a job you might find one of these lists from now on".

"Would you mind popping in there to see who is having a meeting?" Lucy asks Belinda to go into the toilets to see who is in there because several children can clearly be heard having a discussion at some volume. Lucy begins to explain to the children why they might find a list at one of their jobs "You do things like this in prep all the time".
"Can anyone smell that chocolate cake?"
Several children nod.
"In a moment we are going to have some fruit"
"Do you have to get fruit now?" Grace asks Lucy. She had not placed her fruit in the bowl; she retrieves a large bag of dried apricots from her bag and hands them to Lucy.
"Can you give those to Mrs Jane please?"
Lucy begins talking to the class about their buddies; some of the children have polar bears that are not yet complete. "If you've done some stamping today then you can go and wash your hands. Oh, that reminds me, who has been putting the soap into the little slots in the sink". The children look around at one another although no one knows anything about this. The children line up at the toilet door, and when they have washed their hands they line up at the bench.

Luke is holding a large cardboard box and then rips it in half. "Why did you do that?" Lucy asks. Luke looks at the floor and shrugs his shoulders. "Now no one else can use that". Lucy places the ruined box in the bin and then washes her hands. Lucy

stands at one edge of the bench that runs almost the entire length of the wet area. There is a list on the wall with each child's name on it. Next to each of the names are a list of fruit and other foods that the children do and do not eat.

"Do you like cheese?"

"I love cheese".

"Okay, people who are lining up, can we do that more quietly please?" The children quieten down.

"No, someone is going to get hurt there", Lucy comments to several children who are attempting to push each other off their chairs. "It would be awful if someone got hurt".

Lucy continues to hand out the fruit when Benjamin arrives to collect his fruit. "Do you like watermelon?"

Benjamin does not answer instead he nods his head.

"You need to use your words darling".

"Yes" Benjamin comments in a voice that is difficult to hear above the background noise of the classroom.

"Boys, keep it quiet please".

It is now ten to eleven and Lucy is still handing out fruit to the children.

"We seem to be slow coaches today".

The majority of the boys sit together with the exception of one, who sits at a table with five girls.

Benjamin hovers around near the tables with his drink and bowl of fruit.

"You don't have anywhere to sit. That's a shame that Graham who is meant to be looking after you didn't find you a seat". Lucy has gone to get another chair. "I'll look after you" Albert who is sitting at one of the other tables calls out to Lucy. Benjamin smiles and stands next to him until Lucy returns with the chair. The children at the table shuffle around and create room for Benjamin to join them. As the children finish their fruit they place their bowls in the sink. Lucy is cutting the chocolate cake, while Jim and Brett play with the wooden blocks.

"Do you want some more darling?" Kate nods and carries her bowl over to Lucy.

"Are you sure that you don't want any fruit?" Lucy asks from across the room. I decline.

"Outside time" Lucy comments to the class as Belinda arrives back in the classroom from her break.
Jim and Brett who had been playing with the blocks stop, jump up and walk quickly toward the door. Lucy reorganises the room while the rest of the children get their hats and move outside. The music is back on.

The remaining children finish their fruit while Lucy organises a few loose ends before making her way to the staffroom. Lucy talks to several of the teachers about a child's mother who was not happy that Lucy had combed her child's hair before the photos and what happened when she spoke to her about this.

Other teachers are talking about things in general as well as children they have in their class or have had in their class previously. It is apparent that the staff are close knit, showing an interest in what one another are doing, both personally and professionally. I gained this feeling from the conversation that unfolded. Topics for conversation ranged from units of work that had been planned to how their partners or children were.

Several teachers come and go from the staffroom during the break. Lucy talks to another teacher about something although I am not sure what the content of the conversation is. Conversations generally shift from the general to the specific and usually focus on children and their families as well as things that they are doing in their classroom at the moment.

Lucy continues talking to the teacher about the different schools that she has been teaching in. From the way that the conversation unfolds I get the impression that Lucy had known this teacher from a previous teaching position.

Another role and one that Lucy is often called to take on, is that of educating other members of the school staff about the types of things that occur in a kindergarten

classroom as well as why they happen. Staff meetings, according to Lucy are a prime example of why it is necessary to adopt the role of kindergarten advocate.

I think also another role of kindergarten teachers is to try, when you can, and this is hard, to let other people in the school realise how important your job is because there are an awful lot of people who don't. You only have to go to staff meetings [and hear comments such as], "oh, what about kinder?" or, "What will the kinder children be doing during this? Oh, kinder that's right"

We were forgotten off the photographs. They were only taking grade 6, kindergarten and sport photos yesterday. Kindergarten weren't on the list - that sort of thing. I think that it's really important for the teachers of older children to understand where their kids have come from. And, what work we do to get them to where they are by the time they hit grade three or grade two.

Most of those teachers don't know. Most of them aren't very interested (laughs). So I think that's a really important role to try and make other people aware of what we do and, what's important about what we do. I think that's becoming more and more important now because play isn't considered to be of anything that's very important anymore, or it's not as important as it used to be. With all the TILO's and KILO's and, etc. etc. etc. we seem to be moving further away from the whole idea about play and the importance of play.

Several of the teachers are talking about the cakes that are on the table in the centre of the staffroom. The staffroom is filled with conversation. Small groups have different conversation, although at times someone will say something that receives general comments from those present.

In the meantime, the kindergarten children play in the sandpit, on the swings, throw balls back and forth across the yard although many of them spend their time playing games in which they run round and round the yard.

Bill and Graham play in the sandpit. They draw me into their conversation. "We've got trucks like this at home" Bill tells me as he moves several large, yellow Tonka trucks around the sand. The boys continue to talk to me about the trucks that they have at home and how they were so much bigger than the ones at school.

Lucy has returned to the kindergarten yard and Benjamin's mother greets her. "Next time can you make sure that he has something better than chips" Lucy comments to Benjamin's mother who is a pre-kinder parent.

Lucy comments to me as the children continue to play in the kindergarten yard. "This is the sort of thing that you have to justify all the time. You're not teaching one to one but they are still learning" I am aware that young children learn a great deal through play. Lucy sits on the edge of the sand pit talking to the children about what they are building and why they have built it in a certain way.

Graham requests that Lucy gets some water so that he is able to make a moat and also make sand castles easier to construct. This is the beginning of a regular trek for Lucy. She walks between the sink and the sandpit numerous times, on each occasion carrying a bucket of water for the children to use.

Lucy describes her work with children as being that of a facilitator even though she does not like the term. I guess that it may have something to do with the negative connotations that are often associated with the term, in particular the perception that you are not really doing anything in particular with the children but rather just providing the resources for them to use.

A lot of my time, today for example, when I said to you "I feel like all I've done is walk in and out of this door all morning" and, it is just facilitating. You're just a facilitator. I hate that word but that's what you do. You know, you're just there setting things up so that children can broaden their experiences. For example, the sandpit and the buckets of water, you know, "what did you do all morning?" "Carted buckets of water up to the sandpit". Those children were working brilliantly up there.

I had observed the interaction between Lucy and the children, she must have been conscious of the ever present note pad that was always on hand. I agreed with Lucy at this point in the interview because the children had been learning, not just playing, but learning through play. However, the conclusion that I have drawn from my observation of the events that unfolded in the sandpit may be based on my own experiences of early childhood education, either while I was at university or in classrooms at various times. Nevertheless, it was evident from the way in which the children were interacting and working in the sandpit, that it was more than simply moving sand around.

They were doing a whole lot of problem solving weren't they? They were, I can justify that, I don't have trouble justifying any of that. I think that a lot of people would - a lot of other early childhood teachers and you'll hear people say "Oh, I couldn't be a kinder teacher" and that's why, because they can't work. They can't justify, reconcile with themselves standing around emptying buckets of water into the sandpit or - you know - those sorts of things or talking to children about how they've built something and why they've built it - like the kids there with the big plastic blocks this morning and the boat.

Lucy is comfortable with being a facilitator even though she does not like the term. Not everyone is able to just stand back and let the children do their own thing. At one point during my observation of Lucy at work, she commented that she hated ringing the bell, calling the children inside from their play. In her opinion, it is not easy to stand and watch children, providing them with time to do their own thing.

So I think you've got to be - it takes a special sort of person, not special, but a particular type of person -to be able to, and you've got to enjoy it. You've got to like doing that. A lot of people couldn't, I know people, I could point out a few in the staffroom who would - they would - they would just hate it and yet they're grade one and grade two teachers.

"Can I ring the bell?"
"Yes, outside that would be lovely. Okay, in and on the mat thanks".
"Matt, did you hear the bell?"
Some of the children need to be reminded that they are supposed to be putting their things away and sitting on the mat. "Someone still has their hat on". Several of the boys laugh, including Luke who is wearing his hat. He places it on the hook with his bag and returns to the mat but not before spinning around on the spot several times.

Jane enters the classroom several minutes after the rest of the children and is totally covered in sand. It has stuck to her as a result of the water being added to it. Lucy washes as much of it off as possible using water from the water play area.

The class have gathered on the mat.
"Children with jumpers on, you might like to take them off because you all look very hot". Most of the children who had been very red in the face take off their jumpers, hang them on their hooks and then return to the mat.

"We are going to have something very special now".
"Cake" the class yell in chorus.
"You know what I was thinking?" Lucy is interrupted by excited voices, talking about various aspects of the cake and what type of cake they had at their last birthday. "I was thinking that we might have the cake outside under the tree in the shade".

There is a little trouble finding some matches. Eventually they are found and the candles lit. The children sing "Happy Birthday" again to Kate and then discuss what she might have wished for.
"A remote controlled car" Luke suggests.
"I think that might be something that you would have wished for".
Luke laughs.

The children do not end up sitting under the tree; instead they are on the bench that runs along the front of the classroom. Several of the children who had finished their cake need to be reminded that it is not time to run around.

The children return to the classroom and assemble on the mat, in front of Lucy's chair. Lucy begins reading a book, asking questions at regular intervals. Two parents have already arrived and sit on the bench at the front of the kindergarten waiting for the day to end.
"That bridge doesn't look very safe" Nicole comments.

Belinda is busy dismantling a structure and packing the blocks away at the back of the classroom. Allan and several other children who had worked with the blocks during the session watch as she does this with shocked looks on their face. She is after all taking apart one of their finest architectural and engineering achievements.

As time passes more and more parents arrive. They periodically look into the classroom to see what is happening and then resume their conversations with other parents who are also waiting. All of the children are now focused on the story. They occasionally add their own pieces of information to the story or ask questions about something that has happened.

"The sun has got gas in it".
"That's right".
"No Luke, someone has their hand up over there. You tell some good stories don't you James. I think that you might pull our legs quite often, don't you?"
Lucy comments about a story that involves James and a fish that he had caught while at the North Pole.

Most of the parents or carers have arrived and stand out the front of the kindergarten. Usually they wait out the front of the kindergarten, although both of the kindergarten doors are open (I wonder whether this makes the room seem more inviting as it is not something that I have considered, nor noticed, previously). Lucy has written a message about the school photos on the whiteboard on the door because a large number of parents have been asking about this.

As it gets closer to the time for the children to leave, they look to their parents or carers more frequently. Some of the children seem oblivious to the fact that there is someone there to collect them and their attention remains focused on Lucy. The children are then dismissed according to the letter of the alphabet that their names begin with, although Lucy begins at the end of the alphabet.
"That's not how it goes" Jacob comments to her. The children get their bags from the rack and then return to the mat. The children have large library bags in addition to their school bags. The temptation of a new book is too much for many of the children and they take them out, look at them, share them or just hold on to them.
"Don't forget to check the box" Lucy reminds the group of parents who have assembled in the doorway. "We have newsletters today".

Lucy is talking to two of the parents about something. "We are so pleased that we solved the mystery of the missing book today", Lucy comments to one of the parents who laughs at this comment along with Lucy.

Lucy's half-day kindergarten session is over, although she also runs a full day session and this is where her portrait continues. The children who attend full day kindergarten sessions each lunch at the tables in the wet area before they are dismissed to play for the lunch break. The full-day children return from their lunch

break, and get their blankets and pillows from the cupboard. Each blanket has the child's name on it.

Albert was not able to find his home reader. Lucy had been looking for something else on the easel that sits next to her chair and unearthed the book. "We will have to take that note out of your bag".

"Is that spot alright for you?" Lucy asks, as Rachel tries to fit where there clearly is no room for her. Lucy plays a CD with relaxing music on it. The blinds are drawn, and the room is silent with the exception of the music that is being played.

Lucy is looking in her diary while Belinda tidies up a few things that are left on the sink. Some of the children are restless, while others clearly needed the rest. They have not moved since they lay down. The second bell rings for the rest of the school, interrupting the silence that had previously filled the room.

Lucy issues several reminders about what should happen during the relaxation time, that is, they are supposed to be resting. They follow her instructions although she has to move to that area of the room before they are actually quiet. I can hear a child crying. I am not sure who is crying or why.
There is a large wooden dolls' house in the corner near the storeroom. I'm not sure whether it is a new addition to the room or something that I had not noticed previously. Grace constantly organises her blanket and then repeats the process.

"I dumped my girlfriend at school today. We're just friends now", Samuel tells me while he looks at a "Meg and Mog" book. He sits on his pillow, legs crossed looking through the book until he decides that he has had enough. With that he quickly changes his book and then sits back down on the pillow.

Some of the children read by themselves although many of them are sharing their books with others or at least talking with others about things in their books.

Lucy continues to move around the room while she listens to the children "read".

There have been numerous requests for another sharing time as Lucy listens to them read. "If you are that desperate to have sharing time, I guess that we could".
"Yeah" the class chorus.
"This is not a good afternoon activity", Lucy comments to me and then to the class. "I know we don't usually have a sharing time in the afternoon because it is hard to concentrate. You will have to try extra hard". The type of program that is offered to children in Lucy's class also depends on the day.

There are times when we have much more whole group, whole indoor time or whole outdoor time and there are times when we have lots of discussion We don't do that very often, and they're not very good at it (laughs) which is probably one reason why we don't do it all that often.

"See if you can roll your pillow in your blanket".
The children store their blankets and pillows and then return to the mat for sharing time. For her sharing time Kate sings a song with the help of her doll. The class, taking her lead and that of the doll, break into song. When the performance is finished the class give her a clap and then she takes her place on the mat.

Sharing time is complete and Lucy returns to finding out who had completed various pieces of work. "Who did this lovely drawing?"
Time passes and the owner of the drawing is finally found. Lucy asks Rachel several questions about what she has drawn.

"Would everybody sit quietly on the mat. Madeline is sitting beautifully on the mat". The other children quickly find a space on the mat and sit in a similar fashion. Lucy starts to read the class a story. The phone rings and Lucy asks if I would be able to answer it. I do, taking a message which I relay back to Lucy who is still reading the story. Before I have a chance to tell her what the message is she has guessed who it was "Mr Charles?"
"Yes, he is attending to a first aid issue and will be down as soon as possible".
Lucy smiles at me. We had a conversation several days earlier about specialist lessons, in particular physical education. Lucy was adamant that the first specialist time that was interrupted by a supposedly more important issue in the school was kindergarten.

I do find that a lot of people, particularly in - within the teaching profession don't have an idea - don't have an understanding of what we do and don't always see the importance of what we do. Not here so much, and as I said to you last week, when you've got senior staff who are early childhood trained you haven't got a problem, but it's pretty tough in a school where you haven't.

Because I don't think they [Senior staff] see what we do as, as important as what happens further up the school. Because we're not doing tests and we're not doing writing and we're not sitting down - you know learning formally - doing formal teaching I don't think that they see what we do as important as what they do [themselves].

I asked Lucy to comment on the reasons that she believed may account for the lack of understanding that teachers who work further up in the school have about kindergarten and kindergarten teaching. Lucy had an idea that other teachers were not able to relate to the children and went as far to say that they were scared of them. This was not the first time that the notion of people being scared of small children had been raised.

I don't think they see it as unimportant, but I just think they think that what they do is more important, much more important in fact. The further up they get, the further they get from what we do. Grade five / six teachers - particularly some grade five / six teachers, I think they find little children a bit scary because they don't know how to deal with them. They don't know what to do when they cry. A lot of them don't even know how to react when they talk to them. They just don't have a rapport with little children, so that they find it all - it's all a bit of a mystery. They don't understand. I think that's a lot of it. They don't really understand what we do and why we do it. And all they hear about is cooking scones and playing in the sandpit. They've got a very stereotypical idea of what we do.

With the P.E teacher delayed, Lucy prepares the class for a number game. "Make a lovely circle, ready for a game of Buzz. Remember that when we make a circle we only need to be holding two people's hands".

Lucy asks James to choose the Buzz number. "I hate waiting for people" Lucy comments to me, while shaking her head to reaffirm what she has said.

The physical education teacher has finally arrived and tells the children several jokes. It is now ten past two. The boys are dismissed to go and get their hats while the girls sit on the mat. The children leave the classroom for physical education and return

some time later. They sit on the mat waiting for Lucy who is talking to a parent in the doorway of the room.

I think again, all teachers have played this role [as a counsellor], but probably more so in kindergarten because of the way that the room is structured and the way our days are structured. There's more opportunities for people to come in and bare their souls to you, you know. They tell you all their problems, and break down on your shoulder and all those sorts of things. I guess a counselling course would be really handy for me. Actually one time I nearly did the lifeline one. I should - they sort of train you in listening and making all the right comments at the right time, which we're certainly not trained for but my goodness we do a lot of that. Yeah, that's nice to be able to do that, to feel that you're actually making a difference - that you help people - helping other adults.

The children have conversations in small groups while they wait. Belinda sits in front of the class and asks them a number of questions related to the number of fingers that she is holding up. "Not too loud", Lucy comments from the doorway. The children have returned rowdy from physical education. Luke's younger sister has come into the classroom and sits on the mat next to him.

Lucy has resumed her position in front of the class and leads them in a song, "Open, shut them".
"Why do we do these songs with our hands?"
"So that we can do lots of beautiful writing" the class chorus. They are obviously familiar with the rationale for the use of finger song or rhymes in kindergarten.

As with all teaching there are observable changes in the children as the year progresses. It is this development that Lucy finds particularly rewarding, and the development is not just restricted to the children.

You start off with these little dots, and by the end of the year they're their own people. I don't think you see as much in other grades, and that, I find that really satisfying. It's lovely to have got them that far. And that's, it's the same I suppose for all classes but I think especially kinder, that's just a real buzz, to see them and remember them at the beginning of the year. See how far they have come socially during the year.

The development that Lucy sees in the parents over the course of the year is also a source of enjoyment and satisfaction.

It's quite satisfying to see the development that the parents make too. You know, you start off with these worried, stressed out parents and by the end of the year they've sort of got the idea of how school works and hopefully, I've been the one that's helped them learn that. I like to think that I've been able to do that.

Lucy and the children continue singing a number of finger songs. There are already several parents sitting at the front of the kindergarten. Some of them are reading the newsletter that they have collected from the going home box.
"We can't start until everyone is quiet and still". The parents are also looking at the work that the children have been doing. When each of the parents arrives their children give them a wave through the window. Each parent waves back in turn.

"Okay, let's try our Thumbkin one".
The parents are engrossed in what the children are doing. I wonder if Lucy minds the parents watching as she undertakes what is a normal part of her work? What's more, what do the parents think about what she is doing?

Lucy talks to the children about how they can position certain fingers more easily. The finger songs are now complete and Lucy draws the class' attention to a drawing that one of the children has done. It is on display at the front of the room. The children appear to have thoroughly enjoyed the singing that they have been doing. The children are again dismissed according to the letter of the alphabet that their name begins with.

The children leave the classroom and greet their parents or carers who have come to collect them. Lucy talks to several of the adults who remain in the kindergarten yard. Several minutes pass from the time that Lucy dismisses the children and she stand alone in the yard. It is now the end of the day and Lucy considers the other things that she must do as a kindergarten teacher. "Have I got a meeting?" Lucy asks herself. Today is rare; there is no meeting with the rest of the school staff, specialist teachers or the KTA.

The KTA (Kindergarten Teachers Association) is important to Lucy. In particular the support, professional development and the friendships that she has developed through the association are some of the positive outcomes associated with her participation with the KTA.

I'm quite involved now - these days, sort of accidentally with the KTA and I find that has, that's wonderful. Most kindergarten teachers work in a school on their own; they have no other kindergarten teacher they can talk to. Which is, it would be the only class in the school that, that happens to, except for little schools and there aren't too many of those left these days. So it's wonderful that we, miraculously, most kindergarten teachers have those Friday afternoons they can use to go and do some PD just about kindergarten.

Working with the KTA is something that takes up a fair amount of Lucy's time.

It's a lot of work [the KTA]. I seem to spend half my life on the phone with them when I'm not teaching, organising things like this Kinder Hop (a bus trip around various kindergartens), where you are actually doing something for all the kindergarten teachers. Just having that contact with other kindergarten teachers is wonderful, plus the women that are on, and they are all women unfortunately, who I work with on the executive are just the most wonderful bunch of women. You know, it's just, we've all become really quite good friends, probably still just on a professional level but we all admire each other for what, for the qualities that we bring to, to the whole association.

Lucy also likes being involved in the KTA because it provides her with the opportunity to share some of her knowledge and experiences gained through years of work in kindergarten classrooms.

I think it's important professionally to be able to, to help other kindergarten [teachers]. I suppose I've been a kindergarten teacher for a long time on and off and there aren't that many of us left any more. You know what I mean, we're a bit of a dying breed in a way and I think that - and because of that I've got things that - my experiences that I can share with other people, that might, especially younger teachers, might be able to help them.

I was particularly interested in what being a kindergarten teacher meant for Lucy. This was something that she had trouble with. However, after several minutes of reflection it was actually something that her sister had said about being a kindergarten teacher that Lucy conveyed to me.

Something my sister said to me a little while ago, about what I do, probably makes more sense to me than what I think myself. She said that she thinks my job is really important because I'm not just helping children, I'm helping families and that is probably what it's all about? I help a lot of young mothers I think, with a lot of their parenting issues. So, I think if I looked at it, that would to me be the most important thing that I think that I do, help families as a whole. [Helping] families as a whole is I think as important, if not more important, than what I do individually for children.

Yeah, and that's - I think is probably what is so different about kindergarten teaching to other teaching. Because I don't think other classroom teachers have to do that.

It's nice when you hear that from other people. The sister who said all this to me, has a pretty high flying job herself and I didn't expect to hear it from someone like her (laughs). It's really nice that other people view what you do as something that's important. Because being a teacher can get, can be fairly, what's the word, there's a lot of put downs, a lot of "oh god, you get paid so much and you get so many holidays and what do you really do?" you know, all that stuff.

The comments that Lucy's sister had made to her about being a kindergarten teacher, also made Lucy reflect on being a teacher in general and how the community's perception of teachers has changed over time, particularly since Lucy had first taught.

Teaching has changed over the amount of time that I've been a teacher. When I was first year out at Gayadari, teachers were just the most wonderful people you know. We were embraced as part of the community and we were seen as quite special people. Not that I need to be made special. But, there's not that opinion of teachers anymore, you know, we don't work hard enough and all that stuff that you read in the paper. So, it's nice when someone actually acknowledges that what you do takes quite a bit of skill and is really valuable.

Having conducted the interviews and observations, my time at Veracity Primary School was complete. Well, perhaps the word complete does not represent the end of my time at the school adequately. Maybe I had not finished at the school. The time that I spent at the school with Lucy will remain with me always, I have in a sense taken a little of it away with me. When I look at kindergarten teaching, I know I look at it through the eyes of Anastasia, Sam and Lucy. I am sure that after I have completed my time at the next school I will look at things, with Sarah's views helping to frame what I see as being the nature of kindergarten teachers work. In turn, I hope that you as the reader will be able to take something away from the experience of reading this portrait, even if it is an appreciation of what a diverse job being a kindergarten teacher is.

Chapter Seven - Sarah

One of the things that I say to people all the time is that I feel I'm really privileged to have chosen the career I chose because I love my job, I still love it after 17 years. I still come to work and I still get great pleasure and enjoyment out of seeing the things that go on in children's development... I find it exciting. I still find it exciting, so I feel really lucky about that. I don't think that it's an easy job and I get really tired and worn out, but it's a really worthwhile job.

The classroom, cloaked in darkness is gradually revealed as Sarah draws each of the large curtains that run the length of two sides of the classroom, allowing light to spill across the room. The colours of the displays are intensified in the bright sunlight. A large clotheshorse sits in the corner of the wet area. Sarah carefully folds each work of art, stacking it neatly in a pile on the bench that runs the length of the wet area. Sarah has already been in the classroom for fifteen minutes since arriving at 8 o'clock. With this done Sarah begins taking down the small plastic chairs from on top of the tables.

Was this something that Sarah had always wanted, to be a teacher? From an early age teaching was something that Sarah was interested in. This motivation was enhanced through watching her mother at work.

All my childhood I remember seeing her engaging in things outside of school hours and also at school as a child I went to school with her. She was a teacher at the primary school that I was at.

There are many different ways in which people become interested in particular professions. In Sarah's case, her mother portrayed a sense of enjoyment for her work as a teacher and this was something that Sarah picked up on.

I always saw that she loved her job, and was very dedicated to it and so it made me become interested in it.

As a grade ten student, Sarah began to show an interest in pursuing teaching as a career.

My mother arranged for me to spend some time with the kindergarten teacher and help out at the end of the year when I had finished grade ten. I did the same thing again at the end of grade eleven and twelve.

This proved to be an enjoyable experience for Sarah, spending time with an experienced teacher in a kindergarten environment. It also served to generate an interest in not only being a teacher, but specialising in one particular area.

I suppose that was what made me really look at kindergarten teaching for the first time, as a specialist area rather than just teaching. I knew exactly what I wanted to do from a fairly young age; I would say that I'd decided.

While at college, Sarah was not always focused on becoming a kindergarten teacher and at times would venture off task. However, at the back of her mind was the idea that being a kindergarten teacher was something that she wanted to do.

I got my act together and worked hard in grade twelve and got through and had an interview and all that sort of thing and went off to university. I just always knew that was what I was going to do. Yeah so that's that.

Sarah's teaching experience over the past 17 years has been varied, teaching at both rural and urban schools as well as some that are difficult to staff. However, most of Sarah's teaching experience has been with young children.

I haven't worked with older children, except that I've spent some time doing acting senior teacher roles at Mitre and at Tennon and in those roles I have had more to do with older children but only working in small groups and things, not whole class teaching.

Sitting at one of the small desks in the wet area, Sarah writes on a small square sheet of paper. Each day Sarah makes a list of things that she would like Rebecca, her assistant, to do during the morning. That way if Sarah is engaged in an activity with the children or a conversation with a parent, Rebecca is able to read the note and know what Sarah would like her to do. With the note complete Sarah places it on one of the benches that runs along the length of the back wall, forming part of the wet area.

Sarah makes her way to the storeroom at the end of the porch and disappears inside. Several children have arrived and with their bags placed in "bag room" they help Sarah organise the outdoor equipment that has been selected for the day. The last piece of outdoor equipment is set in place as the clock approaches 8:40. By now most of the children have arrived, and Sarah greets each of the parents, talking to them about various things. For Sarah, being a kindergarten teacher requires a considerable amount of time being spent talking to parents.

That's a huge aspect of it and that can actually be very demanding too. Because you need to spend a lot of time talking to parents and reassuring them, keeping that communication going and I'm sure that prep teachers do a lot of that too. You actually have parents, right well we've had a year at school [after kindergarten] we're feeling comfortable. Once prep starts for a while then they start to think oh yep they're fine, they're going okay, and they will stand back more. Where in kindergarten all year that interaction is much bigger.

Sarah walks through the "bag room" a small room situated at the far end of the classroom. It has two doors, one leading to the porch and the other to the classroom. There are low benches that run around three walls of the room. Above them are individual hooks, each adorned with a child's name.

Sarah stops at a large display board and shelf and begins to straighten its contents. On close inspection I realise that it contains a number of brochures, photos and general information about what the children do each day and learn through various activities. This is one way that Sarah informs parents about what the children are able to learn through the activities they engage in during a kindergarten session.

The thing I suppose is still challenging at times is convincing people of how important the kindergarten year is and convincing them of the importance of play experiences and those sorts of things in their development. Parents, because of their own school experiences, and because school's changed so much, still seem to think that formal work equates to learning and that there's not learning going on unless they're involved in formal work. We have to keep working on that to help them build understandings about what's going on in the kindergarten program. I think that it's something that you need to be consistently focusing on and I do things like send little notes home to the parents about different aspects of play and what they may have learnt through a play experience like block building. Just so they realise the importance of those experiences.

There is a group of children milling around in the centre of the room. "What would you like to do?" Sarah asks them. Anne and Claire shrug their shoulders, while

Dana heads toward the construction equipment that has been set up in one of the corners at the front of the room.

Sarah is busy working with a group of children in one corner of the room. The children are drawing pictures of themselves. "You can choose whatever you like" Sarah instructs one of the children who has completed the drawing of himself.

Sarah looks comfortable both in front of the whole class as well as working with individual children. This has not always been the case, initially it was something that she found particularly confronting.

I would say that one of the scary things for me, which is different now for university students, we did specialist training. When I decided to be a kindergarten teacher I did kindergarten training at university. It was a lot more in depth and when I got my job teaching; I was on a prep class. And that was really scary even though now I think there's not a huge difference in it. I suppose I was fearful of what expectations there might be on me with those children in terms of their academic learning. We were lucky back in those days because we had infant mistresses who were off class. And my mistress was just amazing at supporting me, guiding me, giving me ideas, um very much supported my philosophies on what I'd come out of university believing about education and how important it was for young children to be involved in outdoor play and those sorts of experiences. As a kindergarten background person I was very much of the belief that they should be part of the program even with prep children.

Working with an experienced infant mistress not only had an impact on Sarah's confidence to teach prep.

I feel that she had a huge impact on me feeling comfortable about working with the, older age group straight away and she supported and guided me heaps. So, she certainly had an impact on me. She was a very strong person who had very strong ideas and I believe that the strength in her definitely influenced me. She encouraged me in developing the programs I was using. She encouraged me to be involved in parent programs. So she gave me a lot of confidence in my teaching. So that was excellent. So she certainly had an impact on me.

The absence of an infant mistress is something that Sarah believes impacts on the teaching lives of first year out teachers.

I think that it was different and I really do feel for first year out teachers quite often now, because I don't think that there is often in school the amount of people off class, without class commitments, to support beginning teachers in the development of their skills. Often teachers are left to their own devices and don't have a lot of support from other people. I think it definitely had an impact in that way, that there was

someone there all the time to be that person, to give that support and they actually took that role very seriously as the person who would help you to become a competent teacher. They didn't see you as, okay this person knows everything already. They actually encouraged you to think of yourself very much as a learner too. Just having that person there and I think probably the difference too was that, that person always had early childhood specialist skills.

Danielle and her mother have arrived and Sarah greets them near the door. She begins to explain the drawing activity that Danielle might like to do. While she does this, Danielle stands holding the corner of her mother's jumper.
"Would you like to do one of these drawings?"
Danielle does not answer, instead she shakes her head and looks around the room, surveying what else the day has to offer.
"Maybe later" Sarah adds, in an optimistic manner.

There is a large group of boys working at a construction activity. The materials are scattered across a large portion of the room. Several of the boys lie on their stomachs while they build various structures or create more functional pieces.

"Did you ask them?" Sarah is interrupted from her conversation with another group of children. Greg, a small boy with orange hair blurts out the trouble that he is having at the construction area.
"What words did you use?" Sarah enquires. He looks down as he shifts his weight from one foot to another.
"Let's go and see if we can sort it out".
Sarah gets up from the floor where she had been sitting and walks over to the construction area and begins to ask the children questions in order to sort out the problem. The problem in this instance was that the blocks were taking up too much space and another group of children working nearby, with no other option, had to keep walking through the area where the children were working.

Sarah kneels on the floor while she talks to the children. She manages a discussion with both of the groups simultaneously. A number of alternatives are presented to the children with the ultimate outcome being decided by the children. The group using the construction equipment contains the spread of their equipment and both of the groups continue with their respective activities.

There is a group of three children sitting at a table completing some drawing and writing. Sarah has a conversation with them as she takes several tangram sets from the cupboard near the door to the classroom. "I've taken these out for anybody who wants to use them" Sarah comments to the class as she holds one of the tangram sets up for the children to see.

I believe that children need a lot of encouragement to try and experiment with different activities and experiences so that they get a broader view of what we have to offer and what they can do and what skills they have. I try and encourage children to use a broad range of activities.

"It won't go up any further because there is no more thread" Sarah comments to Dylan who has been having difficulty with one of the bolts that accompany the construction set. Dylan, looking disappointed returns to the construction area, although he continues to move the bolt as far as possible despite what Sarah had told him.

Jeff, who is working on the computer, has managed to exit from one of the programs that they had been instructed to use and is instead playing a game of some description. Having noticed this, Sarah stands next to him while directing him back to the program that he was supposed to be using.

I know that one thing kindergarten teachers find really hard is technology. A lot of kindergarten teachers are still "wow, I've got a computer in the kindergarten room, but their social skills are so important". For me the fact that some children have so much access to it outside of the school environment, I think it's important for you to develop an understanding of where they're coming from with it and the skills that they have. But for me, more importantly, I believe it's really important to provide access to it for the kids who don't have it because I believe technology is increasing inequities in society. There are kids who come to us with no understanding of what a computer even is. I have kids who come who'll pick a mouse up and put it in the air because they don't know how to move a mouse around on a table. I believe I'm supporting them by introducing them to technology and giving them some understanding. I certainly don't let it take over my program; I don't let it become a thing where certain children get to have all the turns. I try to rotate and set up activities so that everyone gets a turn.

Using the computer in the classroom, as part of the daily program is something that Sarah believes is important, more so for the children who do not possess the necessary skills to use the computers.

For the kids who actually don't have the skills, I set up parent help programs and things like that for them to get some one-on-one support so they can develop just the basic stuff of how to operate a computer and use a mouse, turn it on and off, get into a game or program and use it. I also use it to support their learning. For instance patterning, you know there wouldn't be a kindergarten teacher anywhere that doesn't work on patterning... well there are lots of activities and some of the cd's that I've got are on patterning. So we might have done a lot of physical patterning together and activities and then I'll have one set up on the computer for them to complete, on the computer, as part of their tasks and things like that.

Claire has just arrived and having missed the explanation of what the drawings are about, is sitting on the floor next to Sarah while she explains what the activity entails.

"Hi Tim" Sarah greets another parent as he arrives and drops off his son.

"Do you want to sit down and do a drawing?"

Stuart, dressed in dark blue track pants, a white polo shirt and Blundstone boots shakes his head, causing his fringe to fall across his eyes.

"That's fine, you can choose something else to do". The children are able to take part in a variety of tasks during the day, most of these are things the children choose rather than being told to take part in. This forms one of the main differences between kindergarten and other grades.

The children are probably given a lot more choices about where they want to be and where they want to be working in the classroom. You try to work on things a lot more from where they're at. When they get to prep it becomes a much more adult - the adult tends to be more of the centre in terms of the way they organise the programme. I think the children in kindergarten have a lot more choices. So in that way what you're doing in kindergarten is trying to give them those choices so they feel comfortable doing activities that they feel familiar with and that sort of thing. Also making sure that while they are working there that they're developing the skills that they need to be developing. Where once they get to prep, it might be you planning "they are going to do this activity today" or "these five children and these five children are going to do that and I'm going to make sure it rotates so they all get a turn at that". Even though we certainly encourage children to work in other areas in kindergarten it's not so formal in that type of structure. It's more child centred I suppose is the way of saying it, which I hold on to dearly (laughs) for kindergarten children. I think it's really important that they have that opportunity.

Working in this way, Sarah takes on a role that may be different to what other teachers are required to do in the classroom.

I suppose I see myself guiding their experience and being there to support them and intervene in their learning. So I suppose that it's as an interventionist in a way. They're playing. They're working at whatever they're doing and I see myself, my main role then is, intervening in that experience in the most appropriate way possible so that the interaction takes place and so that learning can take place.

Christmas pictures and letters to Santa adorn the walls of the classroom behind the computers. There are also several ear rings that the children have made into Christmas decorations.

"Remember what I said, we are using the computer to learn about other things apart from stamping. You can do some drawing", Sarah comments to Paul who is using the computer and only doing part of the activity that has been set.

Sarah gathers another group of children who have not yet completed a drawing of themselves.
"You need to get a clipboard and a piece of paper".
Sarah explains to the children what they are required to do.
"I know what colour my eyes are" Casey adds during the instructions.

Another group of children work out on the porch. Once Sarah has got the children under way she moves out to join them. They are using a range of musical instruments. An eclectic orchestra - consisting of drums, triangles, xylophones and other percussion instruments are used to create a rich and unique sound.
"What types of sounds can you make with that?" she asks Frances who is holding a small drum. She begins experimenting with the sounds that can be produced by striking it in different places, although she is struggling to compete with the other musicians who are composing in the vicinity.

As the children complete the drawings of themselves they talk to one another, both about what they are doing and a range of other things, including what they are hoping to get for Christmas. There is a partly completed structure in the corner of the room. I am not sure what it is. A sudden yell of pain carries through the room and work grinds to a holt.
"Have you got a sore eye? How did that happen?"
"I poked the pen in it".
Sarah moves over to examine Dylan's eye.
"Are you sure that it is alright?"
Dylan does not answer although he nods his head indicating that it will be fine.

"That's a wonderful drawing" Sarah comments to Eliza who has carried the self portrait over to show her.
"You've thought really hard about that. Well done" Sarah praises Eliza who is now smiling proudly while looking at her drawing.
"Remember when you write your name to write it really carefully" Sarah comments to Ivy who is also working at the drawing activity.

Several of the boys having completed their drawings move back over to the construction area and continue with their building. It appears that they are building a house.

"This is looking very interesting".
"I've made a Pinhoatie".
Sarah looks a little confused, and I am also wondering what it is that Tom has made. He continues to provide Sarah with a description of the Pinhoatie and what it does, adamant that the creation actually matches the name that he has given it.

"You've done some wonderful work today" Sarah comments as she shifts her attention to Paul who is also working in the same area. "What are you making over there?" she asks as she kneels on the floor next to the child.
"A robot hospital".
"You're building a robot hospital. What's this bit for?"
"Well that's to lift the hurt robot to the top so it can stand". Paul continues explaining what function each of the parts of the robot hospital serve.

"We've made a Barbie car" Janine informs Sarah as she gathers up some spare pieces of construction equipment that had strayed too far from the pile.
"A Barbie car, and you're driving. Have you got a mobile phone in your car?"
Janine nods her head. Sarah, looking around the floor near where she is sitting picks up a block and pretends to Janine who is also holding a mobile phone to her ear. Sarah asks Janine a number of questions about the trip and what they will be doing.

Bright green lumps of play dough sit on a small table in the wet area, the gold and silver sparkles reflect the sunlight. Sarah sits down with the children and makes things from play dough with them.

"You've made a snake" Lydia comments to Sarah.
"I have. It could also be a letter S".

Rebecca, Sarah's assistant, is working with a group of children completing a sorting activity in which the children have to sort a number of farm animals into various categories.

"That's the letter that your name starts with" Claire tells Sarah. They talk amongst themselves about the letter that their names begin with and also make the letters out of play dough.

"I'm making a bird nest. Did you know I can make a bird nest?"
"We've seen lots of bird's nests lately. Why do you think we might have seen lots of birds nests lately?" Sarah and Claire discuss why this may have occurred. The conversation lasts for several minutes and several of the other children working at the play dough join in.

Sarah leaves the play dough table momentarily to see what is happening on the porch. When she returns, Claire has spelt out her name with play dough.
"What shape have you made?" Sarah asks.
"A moon".

I believe that children's self-initiation of tasks and their own initiation in play activities is really important in their learning. They understand that there are things that everyone has to do but they also have that ability to self-initiate. I actually think that self-initiation is really important and I think that it's important for children too. I think that they can sometimes lose self-initiation if you take it away from them. If you work with children as they get older, if you still allow self-initiation and negotiation about what goes on in a program, kids will continue to self-initiate but I think they stop once everything is directed by the teacher. I think you have to try to balance that really well once they get a little bit older. We should take the opportunity to use those play experiences as much as we can, to develop their skills and understandings.

"It could be a moon or there is another name for that". Claire looks puzzled.
"It could also be called a crescent". Sarah and Claire continue talking about some of the other shapes that she has made. Sarah continues working with the children and the play dough. She is helping Caleb make the word "Dad" after the child had asked for assistance.

"What's happening over here?"
"I don't know" Jeff responds to Sarah as he is trying to use one of the programs that is running on the computer. Sarah explains what they are required to do while they follow her directions on the computer.

There are now four girls in the Barbie car. They have a conversation about what they can do.
"You can be the mother".
"I can be the sister" Ivy interrupts.
"Well what can I be?"
"You can be the brother or another sister".
"I'll be a sister as well". The girls continue to negotiate the role that they will take on. Suddenly, Janine and Eliza stand up and get out of the car. They make their way to the back of the room and select a large doll.
"I've got the baby" the mother comments to the two sisters and Eliza, whose role has yet to be allocated.

Sarah gathers a small group of children to complete an activity with them. One of the children is concerned about leaving the activity that she had been working at.
"Claire you will look after Anne's things for her won't you?"
"Yes" Claire comments and begins to gather the blocks that Anne had been using, placing them next to her.

"Okay, over here". Sarah points to the space in front of her chair. "Remember how we've been going up to the big school?" Most of the children indicate that they do remember this "Well, I've been talking to the prep teachers and they want to know what you look like". Sarah continues explaining the activity and the children set to work.

"Hi" Sarah calls out to Tina and her mother who have arrived as she walks past the door. "I forgot to tell you" Rebecca comments to Sarah as she finished telling her that Tina would be late because she had to attend a music exam.
"How did you go?" Sarah enquires "Tell me all about it".
Sarah and Tina look over the music.
"I made a few mistakes".

"That's okay, we all make a few mistakes".

Sarah then talks to Tina about playing the two pieces of music that she had played for her exam to the class or else she could just play it to her.

"Everyone". She smiles broadly before going to hang up her bag.

Not all of the work Sarah does as a kindergarten teacher involves work with kindergarten children or their parents.

Not only working within an environment and doing the best I can for the kids in my care but actually being out there and being an advocate for the needs of the four and five year olds that I teach and that their needs are different to the twelve year olds in a school or the eight year olds in a school. Trying to be an advocate and stand up for them and their needs so I see that as a really important part of being a kindergarten teacher.

Being an advocate for kindergarten aged children and providing information about what happens in a kindergarten classroom is not something that Sarah only has to inform the broader community about. Other teachers also need to be informed.

Many teachers have never taught kindergarten ... a lot of people just won't go down that far. They'll teach early childhood classes down to prep or they'll be a primary teacher. I think that some of them don't have a full understanding of what it means to be a four-year-old starting school for the first time in your life and all the needs that you have. I think that it's really important for us to be advocates and explain and try to help other people understand what the needs of your age group are. I see that as a really important part of my role as a kindergarten teacher.

"Mrs Harte, can I go now?" one of the children working at the sorting activity enquires when Rebecca returns.

"You need to listen" Rebecca responds to Peter who is completing the farm animal sorting activity with her. There are a number of animal names written on a small whiteboard. The children copy the names of the animals under the cards. The sorting component of the activity requires the children to collect and then write the appropriate number of animals in each group on the whiteboard.

Sarah has made her way over to the Barbie car.

"I was wondering if I would be able to go for a drive in the car?"

"Yes" the Mother, two sisters and the Father chorus.

"Can the baby just go in there like that?" Sarah asks about the baby sitting on the seat without a seatbelt.

"It can sit on my knee" one of the sisters offers.
"No, they're not allowed" the mother adds in a forceful manner.
"We'll have to build a baby capsule".
"What could you use to build that?" Sarah enquires.
The children find a large cardboard box and prop it up on an angle using several blocks.
"Do we need something to tie it in?"
Sarah continues talking to the children as they arrange the baby capsule and other parts of the car.
"We can't have that over there".
"Yeah" one of the children reinforces that a seat is able to be positioned where it is.
"That's a good idea, you did need something at the back" Sarah adds to the conversation.
"Everyone put on their seat belts" the Father comments as he takes his seat behind the wheel.
The baby is positioned in the middle of the car and each of the children look at it periodically as if making sure that it is all right.

"Can I come?"
"You had better find a seat and put on a seat belt".
"What's this?" the latest passenger enquires.
"That's a microphone to talk to the driver" the father informs him.
"Oh, look I just saw some Kangaroos" Sarah adds while in the bus (the car has become a bus after additional seats were added to accommodate an influx of passengers).
"What else could we see while we are driving?"
"Driver how far is it to St. Helens?"
"One minute".
"Thanks for the lift. See you later, have a good journey" Sarah calls to the children on the bus as she disembarks and walks over to where another group of children are working.

"Casey is doing new things every time he goes on the monkey bars. He's learning lots of things" Sarah comments to one of the children who has come inside to tell her about the different things that Casey is able to do on the monkey bars.

Dylan approaches Sarah for assistance. A wooden peg has become lodged in one of the pieces of equipment. Sarah sits down on the floor and attempts to remove the peg. She places the piece of construction equipment on a low table and continues trying to remove the peg.
"I don't think that we will be able to get it out".

Sarah moves outside on to the balcony that runs along the front of the kindergarten classroom. There is a large roof that extends down over this area. Underneath it is a selection of wooden play equipment including the monkey bars. She watches patiently as Casey moves back and forth across the monkey bars showing her the various "tricks" as he calls them. Sarah is joined by Simone and Frances who are also eager to show her what they are able to do on the bars.

I don't run a fully indoor / outdoor program but I run the indoor / outdoor where they can go on to the deck and use the monkey bars and use particular activities that I've set up out on the deck that are physical activities all the time. They have access to those at every time of the program. It also allows for some stress release too, when children are inside and they need that ability to get out and be active so we do it in that way.

The children in the car are now having lunch, which in this instance is a large assortment of plastic fruit. They serve themselves from a large platter and then sit back in one the seats.

"You're breaking my car! Mrs Clarke everyone's wrecking my car!" (I am interested Janine has taken ownership of the car, even though it had appeared to be a product of the group working with the large wooden blocks).
Sarah returns to the classroom and is confronted by a car that has major body damage and an owner in a highly irritated state.
"Everyone stop for a second. Janine tell them what you want to say".
"Well everyone's wrecking up bits of my car".
"How can we sort this out?
"Fix the car".
"Then what?" Sarah enquires.
"They could fix up the car".
"Yes, but we need to be careful and everyone needs to cooperate".

The main part of our role as the kindergarten teacher is working with kindergarten children. I suppose the major focus for us is in developing the social skills so that they can be capable at coping with the rest of their school life basically. So, trying to develop those important cooperative skills so that they can work and play together.

For some children it's the first time they've actually ever had to deal with this size group of people. Just managing sharing and cooperating is a huge task. So, we do a lot of work on that. A lot of work on problem solving skills in social situations and we actually teach them a three part message. The, you know, "stop it... I don't like it... if you do it again I will tell an adult". I focus on that really heavily and I support children while they're learning to use those words. I do a lot of work in being with the child actually standing beside them while they express the words because it takes children a lot of confidence to be able to use that type of language independently.

The skills that the children learn not only make life in the classroom more productive, they will also be important later in their schooling.

I think they need a lot of support and my hope is that when they go on to their next year of school where they have to play in the playground with 200 other children and deal with stuff, I will have given them some strategies to manage some of those social situations that are going to occur. I see that as a major part of my role, but I don't believe that it's the only part.

"Simon put that on my chair when you have finished".

"Jeff, you need to put your name on this so we can save this" Sarah comments to one of the children working at the computer, creating a Christmas card.

"I'll need some help".

"What do you need to say Stuart? You need to ask me a question so that I know what you need help with".

"Can you please do up my shoelace?"

"Great, now I know exactly what you want me to do".

"The phone is ringing" one of the children calls out from the doorway

"Well done" Sarah comments to one of the children before heading back inside to answer the phone.

"How many teachers have to answer phones all day?" Sarah comments to me on the way past. I wonder who is on the phone, and why they are ringing in the middle of class time. Would a grade six teacher receive a call in the middle of teaching time?

Sometimes you feel challenged as a kindergarten teacher because your job is somehow not as important because you work with very young children and "you're only a kindergarten teacher" and I suppose one of the reasons that comes about is, "Well you don't need to know much in terms of academic knowledge, you wouldn't need to have high mathematical thinking or etc". I think you do have to have very high-level understanding of what it means to be this age and that whole range of developmental experiences that's needed. And it is very specific knowledge that a lot of other people haven't got and so, I'd say that we do have to sometimes stand up and express that we're just as important as everybody else. I've taught other early childhood classes so I know what it means to be a prep teacher and a grade one teacher and things like that as well. I feel proud of the kindergarten teaching side and I thoroughly enjoy this. I thoroughly enjoy kindergarten teaching. I suppose one of the things that I could say is that I feel really proud to be a kindergarten teacher.

Sarah has returned to the porch "that's really exciting" she comments to Simone as she demonstrates her ability to balance on the balance board that is near the monkey bars.

"I knew you would be able to do it".

"Whoa, that's fantastic". Sarah comments to Frances who is working on the monkey bars.

"I can do reverse monkey".

"That's a good word to use. We can say backwards or we can say reverse. Well done!"

The other absolutely essential role we play is in the development of their motor skills. I believe that children who are competent physically... in our society... have greater chances of social acceptance. I actually think physical capability is important for their social life as well as their actual physical development. I think that it's really important that a major part of the program involves them in physical activity and also the link between developing their fine motor skills and their future success at hand writing and things like that, so there's not frustration later on in their schooling. I think those things are really important and we do have that as a large part of our program. They have physical activity all the time.

"You've broked it" Caleb comments to himself as he attempts to make something from the play dough. 'It's mashed" he comments to himself again. Jeff is calling his name although he doesn't appear to notice. Jeff, walks over, mutters something to him and then returns to the construction area. Greg has also settled down at the play dough table.

"Mrs Clarke I twisted on the Monkey bars".

"Oh, you people are getting clever on them".

Sarah makes her way over to the door and watches the children on the bars.
"When each of you have had a turn, I would like you to come and do a job with me".

Sarah returns her attention to inside the classroom just in time to see two boys running at full pace across the room. The fact that Sarah had noticed them running was enough to make them stop and look at her.
"Jason and Paul, what have you just forgotten?"
"No running".
"That's right" they both walk to where they were headed.

Ivy and Simone have decided to make some signs to put in and on the Barbie car. They set about collecting paper, pencils and sticky tape before returning to the car.

"You have to decide who you are going to make the card for" Sarah comments to one of the children who is working at the computer.
"I'm giving mine to Nan".
"I want to give mine to my family".
"That's lovely!"

"Is O next?" Simone who is busy writing signs for the car interrupts Sarah
"Pardon".
"Is O next?"
"Yes, that's right".
"What's next?"
"What sound is it?"
"I".
"That's right Simone, well done".
"I might give you some of the words" Sarah suggests to Simone as she writes them on a blank piece of paper.

I believe that we play a really big role in developing literacy and numeracy skills and, that the way that we go about that is what's important. We should never deny, like I think sometimes some people focus on the fact that in kindergarten you shouldn't be worrying about that sort of thing. Literacy and numeracy skills start from birth and they're developing and we do play an active role in developing those skills but the way that we do it is what's important. I do believe that we play a vital role in helping

their families to understand the important role they play in developing those skills as well.

I see my role to make literacy and numeracy experiences meaningful to the children. So... using things that they're involved in and doing to become part of those literacy experiences. When you were here the other day just that block building experience with the kids writing and putting labels on their buildings and things like that. So... encouraging active involvement in play, but then involving literacy and numeracy experiences in the play that they are working on.

"What else would you like to make signs for?"
Simone, who is looking a little put out after being joined by three other children, recites a list of items as Sarah writes them down.
"Let me count how many" Ivy begins counting after she loses interest in the signs. She returns to the car and begins to count the number of passengers in the car and the available seats.

The same two boys who had been out at the monkey bars are still there. They have shown no sign of stopping what they are doing. "One more turn and then you have to come inside and do this job" comments Sarah, having noticed that they are not about to come inside.

The children, who are in the car, take it in turns to hold the baby.
"It's a Baby Born" Ivy points out to Greg who is standing next to the car with some play dough.

The boys sitting next to me at the computer wrestle with each other.
"Oh you're a quitter" they chant to each other. They laugh about this and then settle back to work on the computer.

"Mrs Clarke look" Miranda holds up one of the tangram boards with a completed picture of a train on it.
"You have made that exactly the same haven't you. What shapes did you use?"
"Rectangles, squares and circles".
"How many shapes did you use?" Miranda shrugs her shoulders.
"How could you find out?"
"Count them". Sarah nods as Miranda begins counting the shapes.

Sarah has returned with a clipboard and sits down with a group of children who are working with the construction equipment. "Are you still making a nutcracker?" she enquires.
"Yes" Gerry responds and then continues to explain how the nutcracker works.

"Did you take the signs off?" Sarah asks one of the children who immediately looks in the opposite direction.
"No Caleb, look at me, did you take their signs?" Caleb and the other two boys building the cubby house must have decided that they too would like to make some signs for things they have included in their cubby house.
"Yes".
"Well there is paper and sticky tape over there so you can make your own signs".

I suppose, as a kindergarten teacher and my university experience, we always tried to really focus on the whole child and not just specific parts, which school is supposed to be about. You know, like parents see school as literacy and numeracy type stuff and I suppose it's one big thing that kindergarten teachers have always seen themselves as developing the whole child. We're looking at the physical, social, emotional needs and then the cognitive skills, the whole picture of the child not just the academic.

"We're going to do some reading" Sarah comments to several children who are now seated on the mat as she collects a book from the shelves. Sarah works through the book with them. She encourages the children to point to each of the words as she reads. Although it is not always the case, these children have been grouped by their needs in terms of their reading ability for this particular activity.

I also do believe that our role is to tap into the similarities and differences of children. As a kindergarten teacher I don't think that I'm going to get all these children and they're all going to be at the same level. I really try to find out about their backgrounds and where they're coming from and the understandings that they already have about things and try to build on those. So I suppose I see my role as a kindergarten teacher to take them from where they're at and build on those skills. Those skills can be quite highly developed, so I don't see that the kindergarten curriculum is some sacred thing where if a child is ready for reading and writing and has an understanding of number way beyond their age that you wouldn't engage them in activities that still challenge them.

Working with individual children and where they are at is not always the main focus for Sarah.

You're not only looking at individuals. You're saying, well these children have similar needs so there would be times where I would get those children together in a group and work on specific activity with them to help develop those skills. So it wouldn't always be them choosing and me working with where they come from. There are times when I would take them and work with them in a specific group on a specific activity.

"Do you think that we could work a little more quietly in here?" Sarah half questions, half suggests to the children who are working in the cubby house.
"Yes" they respond.
Sarah helps Gerry with a piece of construction equipment that he was not able to separate from several other pieces.

"You can listen girls if you like". Janine and Frances sit down with Sarah and Peter who are starting to read the book.
"Here's a tricky page" Sarah comments as she continues working with the children. Peter continues to read pausing occasionally to seek reassurance from Sarah.
"That's fantastic reading Peter!"
"I would like you to choose your favourite part of the story and draw a picture of it". Two boys playing with the play dough catch Sarah's attention. Laughing they throw large balls of the play dough to nearly the height of the roof and then catch them again. This is no mean feat for five-year-old children. "Stuart and Greg keep it on the table please". The children smile and place the play dough back on the surface of the table. They whisper and then laugh about something.

"Would you like to read this together?" Sarah asks Janine and Frances who had been sitting with her while Peter was reading. The two girls are eager to read to Sarah and read alternate pages.

Jeff and Greg look at the tadpoles that are on the display table along with some silk worms and an assortment of related books.

One of the children from the cubby house makes his way toward Sarah holding a sign he has made. In large red letters the word "T.V" has been written on the middle of the page.
"Have you made a T.V?"
"No".

"Well you might have to go and make a T.V to go with your sign". Caleb rushes back over to the cubby house to make a T.V. The children can be heard discussing how the T.V will be made.

The block corner is busy with activity. Sarah stands between the car and the cubby house observing the children while they work. She records information, on a clipboard about the children and what they are doing. Each time I have been in the classroom, Sarah has taken out her clipboard and recorded information for each of the children. As with other kindergarten teachers, Sarah has her concerns about the kindergarten check and what it may lead to in the future.

I think our departments have been pretty good with us so far but the kinder check's just a little bit of an initiation into the idea of collecting data and that sort of thing, not that we didn't collect our own data in the past anyway. All of us had checklists and kept observations of children and all those things that gave us information about them. But, the kindergarten check put a lot of pressure on a lot of the teachers. There are certain aspects of it where they've had to be lined up for and checked off and things like that, which is taking away from the whole comfortable experience of what they usually were doing. Children pick up very quickly on everyone doing that one thing on the same day and that they're actually being compared or you know, he can and I can do it type of stuff.

So, I think that some of that's being challenging for us and I think we need to continue to look at that in the future and make sure that we're, is this appropriate for this age and being advocates and standing up if the department starts to put more pressure on data collection at an earlier age. I think the kinder checks one thing. Something like that -, a tool is fine but not to become here's one tool now we want you to do this and now we want you to do that because you spend all your time checking off things for someone else instead of the real stuff which is about teaching and learning in the classroom. I think the other thing they need to take into account is that we only see them for ten hours a week and just getting through the kinder check with forty five kids is pretty significant.

"You know lots about these words don't you!" Sarah comments. "You're all very clever at your reading and writing aren't you and ..." Sarah is not able to complete the sentence. "Caleb, what was the rule that you just forgot?" Sarah enquires as Caleb attempts to climb to the roof of the cubby house. Caleb does not answer, instead he smiles as he reluctantly makes his way back down.

Sarah moves around each of the groups asking the children questions about what they are doing and providing assistance when it is needed, either because Sarah has

seen someone having difficulty or they have requested it. Arriving at the play dough table Sarah is confronted by an elaborate creation.

"Wow Dylan, what have you made here?" Sarah enquires.

"Fourteen" the girl who had been working at the tangram activity shouts across the room to Sarah before Dylan is able to answer. She acknowledges this and focuses her attention back to Dylan's play dough creation.

"A cave and those are Dinosaurs".

"Does anything live in the cave?"

"Cavemen".

"I'm not sure that cavemen were alive when dinosaurs were".

"Yeah" Dylan adds in a confident tone.

"What's that bit on top of the cave?"

"A nest".

"That was a good idea for a bird to build its nest on top of the cave".

"Not a bird, a pterodactyl".

Morning tea time is approaching and Sarah begins the process of tidying the room. "We need to start packing up. All people who had a turn at the blocks need to help pack them up".

The principal has dropped into the classroom to talk to Sarah about something. I assume that it must have been important for him to drive all the way down to the kindergarten campus. The relationship that Sarah has with the principal and others that she has worked with have influenced her as a teacher.

One of the things I'd say is that, people who work hard themselves, who are your leaders and have a passion for what they're doing, affect your passion for what you're doing. And I think that's a really positive thing. I've been lucky to work with a number of principals that are very passionate about what they do. No matter what faults they may have, like all of us have got areas that we're better at, I think that passion and dedication encourages passion and dedication in other people and so I think that it's important for you to have that around you. I've been lucky to work with a couple of principals like that. That has certainly made me feel like all this work I put in is really worthwhile. I think that's been really good.

The fact that Sarah's principal at this school is not early childhood trained does not particularly reduce the level of support that he is able to offer, it just means that that he is required to provide a different form of support.

You can work in a school for instance where your senior staff might be all primary based or phys ed teachers or whatever. I'm not saying that they can't provide support but they do not have the specific knowledge to provide you with the curriculum type support that you may need. So, they have to do other things like send you out to get support from other PD situations or other people or arranging class visits. But, you haven't got that on hand support that maybe we all had once, so I think that's important...it was definitely a bonus.

Several children, oblivious to Sarah's announcement continue to play.
"It's packing up time, you can tell them" Sarah comments to Greg who has brought to her attention a group of children who had not yet started to pack up.

"Danielle and Miranda, packing up please" Sarah reminds several other children about what they should be doing.
"The Lego basket is over here, we all need to pack that away" Sarah comments to the group of children who had been working with the Lego. Sarah moves over to help some of the children stack the large wooden blocks and smaller ones onto the shelf that runs along the back wall in the corner of the classroom.

"Sit down on the floor when you have finished".
Lydia and Anne pack away the Tangrams and sit as close as possible to Sarah's chair.
"Well done those people who are looking at a book while they are waiting" Sarah comments to a small group of children already sitting on the floor.

Sarah continues to circulate around the room. I'm not sure if this is to keep the children on task, or to make sure that they do not begin to play with the resources again.
"Good cooperating guys" Sarah comments to the boys who had been packing away the Lego.

"I can read this" Eliza, who is sitting toward the back of the room calls out to Sarah as she holds up a book. Sarah stops and crouches down next to her.
"Let me listen".
Eliza opens the book and begins to read several of the words.

Jason and Paul are at the side of the room packing away a puzzle although it is taking them some time. "How are you going with the trickiest puzzle in the kindergarten?" "It's hard".
Sarah moves over to help them complete the puzzle. As the children and Sarah complete the puzzle she asks them several questions about where various pieces go and talks about things that the children could look for in order to make putting the puzzle together easier. The rest of the class are now seated on the floor, reading books while they wait for the puzzle to be completed.

The children replace their books on the shelves and then focus their attention on the Christmas cards that they have made.
"Are you looking at what you've made?" Sarah asks Claire and Dana as they stand near the computer, looking at one of the many display boards that adorn the walls of the classroom.

"We've got a little bit of a problem over here. We're missing a piece of our puzzle". The class stand and begin to hunt around the room for the missing piece to the puzzle. Lydia and Anne who had managed to secure prime seating positions by Sarah's chair are reluctant to move, although they do so. After several minutes of searching the puzzle piece is located in amongst the construction pieces.
"Siting on the mat in a circle. Just waiting for everyone to be in a circle". Several of the children were sitting at the back of the room instead of in a circle. Lydia and Anne have managed to get themselves in the circle on either side of Sarah. They smile at their achievement and share knowing glances with one another. Most of the children have managed to find a space in the circle although Sarah needs to encourage several of the children to find a space big enough for them in the circle. This is something that requires constant attention.

There is a lot to be taught about social interaction and the way that we work together and become a group and work as a team. I actually really, enjoy that and enjoy the whole thing of developing group cohesiveness. Part of my role is to develop that group cohesiveness, develop group skills which probably enable children to then cope a lot better with that formal setting that they'll be engaged in, in the future. I see that social side of it as an important part of me as a kindergarten teacher.

"We need to count around the circle. Let's put our thinking caps on".

The children pretend to put their thinking hats on and the counting begins. Initially the children count around the circle going up by one each time. The children count around the circle several times. "Two, lets go by two" several of the children suggest. then moving on to three. This proves to be difficult for some of the children and requires additional prompts from Sarah before they are able to determine which number they need to say.

With the counting complete the circle is disbanded. The class sit in front of Sarah, and small pockets of conversation can be heard. Sarah looks in the direction of the conversation and it quickly dies away.
"Who can tell me who is away today?
The children call out several names and Sarah writes these on the whiteboard.
"Who can tell me how many children are away today?"

There are normally 24 children in the class. The number of children in kindergarten classes is something that Sarah believes is an area that needs careful consideration.

The "numbers game" in schools has affected a lot of kindergartens. I know that there's been a kindergarten run this year with 26 children in it. I believe that it's not just an issue of the quantity of kids in the class; it's an issue of the adult-child ratio. I just think it's way too many for a kindergarten classroom and I think a lot of kindergarten teachers find it really hard to stand up and say hey, this is too many. we can't do this, these kids are four, for a lot of them it's their first experience outside the home, 26 children is just too many. Childcare regulations, for four year olds should stand for kindergartens. I think that the teacher's aide and the teacher should only be able to have the same quantity of children that a child-care environment can have.

Ensuring that class sizes are not increased to a point that is unsafe or children's education begins to suffer is something that is important to Sarah, as a kindergarten teacher and advocate for young children.

I think you've got to stand up and be counted and we're in danger of ending up with bigger classes and I think that's a dangerous thing, not in terms of just the stress levels for the kids and the teachers but for their future education. If they get a great start, feel good about being here, develop the social skills they need, the physical skills they need, if they've got together some of that literacy and numeracy stuff because there's less people so they get a chance to have a say and talk and discuss and develop understandings about things, then they are going to be better off when they go to prep. So, everyone's disadvantaged by a kindergarten teacher having a huge class. I'd like to see kindergarten all at a maximum of 20 personally. It doesn't

happen like that though. If we can stop them going over that 24 mark that would be great. That's about it.

"Two".

Who can tell me how you write that?"

Dana is selected to come up and write the number on the whiteboard.

Sarah continues asking the children a number of questions related to the way in which various numerals can be written. Individuals are called on to come and write a variety of numbers from one through ten on the whiteboard.

"How come you didn't write a circle around it?" Greg asks Sarah in reference to the circle that is usually drawn around the number of children who are away on any given day.

"Thanks for reminding me".

"You can go and get your morning tea after I have called your name". Sarah begins calling out names and the children make their way to their bags and return with their morning tea and hats. As the children sit and eat their morning tea on the porch Sarah moves around each of the small groups that have formed, talking to children and helping them to open packets, drinks and other things that some of them are not able to manage. The conversation is not restricted to things that the children do at school and ranges from what they do after school to what they think they will be doing on the weekend. Sarah also shares some information with the children about what she has planned for the weekend.

"It looks as though nearly everyone is finished. When you have, you can put your things away in your bag ready for our outdoor time".

Most of the children have finished eating and they make their way down to the play equipment that is situated at the back of the kindergarten grounds. Several of the children play briefly outside although they return to the classroom and continue with various activities that they had started earlier in the morning. This does not appear to bother Sarah.

"Throw me that ball".

"Here" the ball is thrown, although Peter takes his eye off it momentarily causing it to narrowly miss hitting him in the face. Both of the children laugh. I also laugh, not at Peter nearly being hit, but at the irony of the situation. The focus for today's

outdoor session was on ball skills, in particular throwing and catching. While most of the class are playing a variety of games that involve running or climbing or a combination of both, Sarah works with small groups and individuals.

The kindergarten yard covers a large area. Surrounded by houses on three sides the expanse of grass ends abruptly at the fence line. In the middle of the yard are a variety of wooden structures for the children to play on; under them are dark brown pieces of tan bark. The kindergarten building being on a separate site to that of the primary school has its advantages and disadvantages for Sarah.

We're on two campuses, that makes my job even more difficult. I actually think that we have a very special place in terms of a wonderful facility for kindergarten children. The stuff of interacting with the rest of the staff is made more difficult. You have to drive every time you want to go there and photocopy something. I can't just walk down to a photocopier. I have to drive to go and photocopy something. There is just organisational stuff like that, that makes it more difficult being on a separate site and makes your day longer because you've just got to do this zipping backwards and forwards to get things organised.

"Some of the children who manage quite well inside, will be different outside" Sarah comments to me as I watch a group of children playing some sort of game that involves the ball being passed from one child to another, as if simulating a relay.

As time passes the number of children playing outside begins to dwindle. "It's time to come inside" Sarah calls to the last of the children playing outside. Peter, Jeff and Dylan stand in a circle near the bottom of the play equipment. They reluctantly make their way up to the classroom after several minutes.

An old man, dressed in faded brown corduroy trousers and a flannelette shirt has entered the classroom. Sarah acknowledges his presence and continues handing out pieces of work and organising various parts of the classroom. I wonder who the man is, perhaps a grandparent.

The children assemble on the mat in front of Sarah's chair. She talks about some of the things that the children have been doing during the session, in particular the group of children who had been working at the car and all the signs they had made.

Conversations such as this with the children are something that Sarah does on a regular basis. Sometimes the things that the children have learnt during the day or over a longer period of time can be immense.

The other day we were talking about things we learn. I do a lot of discussion with kids about how we learn and try to get them to actually realise there are things involved. Like, someone learnt to go across the monkey bars, so you say to them "how did you learn?"
"Oh I used to go out there everyday and I'd practice". So we'd get them to share things like that and talk about how they learnt to do something. So, that they're building up this idea that if you want to do something you can do it. You've just got to put effort in and try and keep going back to it and things like that, until you do. Anyway we were talking about things that we'd learnt at kindergarten and I said "can each of you tell me one thing you've learnt while you were at kindergarten?" and one of the little boys Kenny said to me he said "Mrs Kat. I've learnt to talk about my feelings at kindergarten" and I just, for me, you know, that was just fantastic. This is so worthwhile. If I've taught someone to be able to feel comfortable with talking about his feelings then I've done a really important thing. That sort of thing makes you feel like you play such an important role in their lives and no one should ever underestimate the role teachers play. I think that it's so important that we realise how important our role is because we can do a lot of damage too.

"We made signs".
"Yes Caleb, you also made some wonderful signs today". Caleb smiles and Sarah continues talking about other things that they did today and what they might do next time they come to school.
The conversation shifts to the two visitors who are in the classroom, the old man and myself. It turns out that the man lives next door to the kindergarten and often comes to visit and have a sing along with the children. I, on the other hand have been in the classroom on numerous occasions, always with notepad in hand, recording most of what is said and done.

Sarah sits down at the piano and begins to play. The children are required to guess what the song is after the first few lines of music have been played. Once the song has been identified the children start singing enthusiastically. The visitor from next door, after making himself comfortable in one of the small chairs, also joins in the singing. I refrain. I wonder if the old man sees Sarah in the same light that she sees herself, as a nurturer. I do.

I suppose in terms of the broader community and how I feel about my role, I see myself as a nurturer. I do see myself as a nurturer, a carer, not just a teacher. So, I

think that the broader community sees kindergarten teachers in that role too and it expects that of us because we're taking over the role from the mother and the father at that stage. It's like for them letting go a bit more and they expect that they will provide that role and I definitely see myself as a nurturer and a carer, not just a teacher as such. So I think that there's an overlap between that childcare scenario and the teaching thing, definitely.

"You can move in nice and close for a story now" Sarah instructs the class, as she closes the lid of the piano and takes her seat in front of the class. During the story Sarah has to pause on several occasions for children who are fidgeting and moving around. At regular intervals during the story Sarah stops reading and asks the children questions about what is happening and what they think might happen. The story is somewhat repetitive, in the sense that the same phrase is repeated at the beginning and end of each page. "What comes next?" she asks.
The children recite the repetitive part of the story. While they do this Sarah points to the corresponding words on the page.
"What's that one?" one of the children asks Sarah.
"You know what that word is".
"The".
"Yes". Sarah continues to point out a number of words that the children are familiar with and asks them to tell her what the word is.

With the story completed and the room packed away it is time for the children to collect their bags. They are dismissed according to the sound that the first letter of their name begins. A large group of parents have gathered at the back of the classroom and also on the porch, waiting to pick their children up. A year earlier many of these parents had brought their child to the kindergarten classroom for the first time, as part of the pre-kinder program that Sarah runs.

We run pre-kindergarten sessions where the children who are definitely enrolling for our kindergarten the next year get to come. When they're ready they can be left on their own. It's building up a familiarity with the school and the people that they're going to be working with here and just that getting the parents in here as often as possible in terms of the parent / child sessions so that they feel comfortable being here. They meet other parents that are going to be here, and developing all those sorts of things.

The pre-kindergarten program provides a transition for parents from home to school as much as it does for the children.

As a kindergarten teacher I believe one of our most important roles is to make the transition from home to school as smooth as possible for families as well as for their children. This isn't just about the kids. For a lot of parents it's their first child coming to school and trying to make them feel comfortable with school because some of them have got very negative attitudes towards school from their own experiences or feel that school's not a place that they need, you know, that they should be involved in or have anything to do with. I think that it's really important...that transitional stuff is a key role as a kindergarten teacher.

Pre-kindergarten sessions also provide parents with a valuable introduction to school culture.

I suppose one of the things it means to me to be a kindergarten teacher is that I'm the first contact for these children and families with the school and so I play a really important role in how they see education and the education system. I see that as a major part of my role... to help them to feel happy about it and believe that we're interested in their children and looking after the best interests of their children when they are at school and, that will continue even when they leave kindergarten.

The pre-kindergarten program is something that Sarah considers to be a vital part of her work as a kindergarten teacher.

I've always felt that a major part of my role is in that initiation of children into a formal school setting. In the past for a lot of children it's actually being their first experience outside of the home and that's changing. In terms of what it means to be a kindergarten teacher, my role has changed over the time that I have been a kindergarten teacher. From once upon a time where we had lots of children who cried and were teary and we don't get a lot of that any more. We might get one or two but we used to have a lot more of that because it was a bigger separation.

There are times when parents are not able to make it in to the kindergarten classroom for one reason or another. In these instances Sarah uses other approaches.

When we get enrolments we also try to make a phone call to the home, if we can't contact people we often make a visit to the home to try to get them to come to those sorts of sessions and get involved. Sometimes we might even visit the home on a few occasions if there's a high needs family and we feel that they're not going to feel comfortable with coming in for a while. We go for a few visits so that they start to feel comfortable with us and then hopefully that transition can be an easier process. So they are the sorts of things that we do to help and I believe that's a really important part of our role as a kindergarten teacher.

A lack of non-contact time can have serious implications for the ways in which Sarah is able to introduce parents and their children to kindergarten.

One of the other ones that I see which hasn't impacted on me, but I've actually been into a few kindergarten environments where kindergarten teachers non-contact time has been totally eroded in terms of they now teach something on Friday afternoons in another part of the school. Whether it be music or drama, whatever, well they take someone else's class while they have some release time. I think that our non-contact time is something that we have to fight for. Things like being able to home visit on those afternoons, if you need to get more contact with families and work things through with them. All those sorts of things that kindergarten teachers do and their pre-school programs and all those things they do in their non-contact time, sometimes aren't valued by the rest of the school.

I think, a challenge for all kindergarten teachers is probably to be better at explaining why those things are important and being an advocate for themselves in that way. Trying to stand up and say "well hang on, these things are really important and this is why we do this... I don't just sit in my classroom and do nothing on Friday afternoon or Wednesday afternoon or whenever it is".

Non-contact time is also important because of the increased workload that teaching in a kindergarten environment can cause. In Sarah's case, because she offers a full day and half-day kindergarten program, she must deal with a greater number of children.

You're dealing with 45 children and the planning's a lot more individual when you're looking at kindergarten children. When children get older there's a lot more grouping that goes on and whole class stuff. So, just the intensity of the amount of preparation you have to do in terms of 45 is just amazing. In our school the reporting policy is basically the same for kindergarten as it is for the rest of the school. I write 45 reports when everybody else does 30. I do 45 records of development. Thirty would be the absolute maximum, I think most of ours are between 22 and 28. It's like they don't even consider that your workload is actually greater, just for that simple fact that you're planning for 45. I think we need to be very strong about the fact that non-contact time is so important.

As each child is dismissed they quickly seek out their parents, with each reunion usually beginning with a warm embrace and conversations of what they had been doing at school. Sarah talks to several parents. I remain seated and the old man makes his way slowly across the kindergarten yard. Opening the gate, he turns and waves to several of the children and then disappears. The room is soon empty with the exception of Sarah, Rebecca and myself. Sarah says goodbye to Rebecca. I thank Sarah for her time and walk with her to the gate of the kindergarten.

Sarah is also an Advanced Skills Teacher level 2 and spends most of her afternoons at the main school campus, in her leadership role. As I get in my car Sarah drives

down the road, heading toward the main school campus. I sit in the car, looking blearily at my worn notebook, adding to the observations that had been recorded earlier. Flicking through the pages it occurred to me that Sarah thoroughly enjoys her work, well at least she appears to. Nothing is too much trouble and she always has the time to listen to the children, talk to parents and complete the variety of tasks that her work requires.

Chapter Eight - Interpretations

8.1 Introduction

The four previous chapters represent the analysis and presentation of the study's findings. In this chapter, the study's findings are linked to the literature, a process that led to the development of a framework through which the nature of kindergarten teachers' work may be examined. The framework acknowledges the personal, professional and social dimensions of working in kindergarten classrooms. Whilst those models examined in the literature review acknowledge the classroom, school and community domains as well as the roles that teachers are required to adopt (Catron & Allen, 1999; Turney et al, 1986), they do not provide access to the meanings that teachers attach to their work or other personal elements of their work. Issues such as providing teachers with a voice, examining what their work means to them, or what is important about their work as a teacher have remained largely unexamined in educational research that has focused on kindergarten teaching and education.

Prior to the examination of the nature of kindergarten teachers' work through the lens of the framework that emerged through the study, I shall discuss the selection of the title of this chapter. The term interpretation, rather than discussion has been selected for use in this study as it more accurately captures the nature and intent of the study, that is, to gain a deeper understanding of the work of kindergarten teachers. The work of Stake (1995) was critical in the decision to adopt the term interpretation. He argues that:

> *the interpretations of the researcher are likely to be emphasised more than the interpretations of those people studied, but the qualitative case researcher tries to preserve the multiple realities, the different and even contradictory views of what is happening (p. 12).*

The stories or narratives that people tell also had an influence on the decision to adopt the term interpretation. As Nespor and Barber (1995) suggest, stories:

> *do not necessarily have clear resolutions. Endings or "conclusions" that resolve problems or complications are standard components of Western narrative, but they are not necessarily characteristic of stories meant to evoke emotion and spur political commitment and action. Instead of having end points, such narratives describe situations as portions of complex journeys that continue to unfold. Their incompleteness and contingency is critical to their meaning (p. 60).*

This chapter provides an insight into a complex journey, one which aimed to gain an understanding of the nature of kindergarten teachers' work through ethnographic case study and narrative approaches to research reporting. The study drew on the techniques of observation and interview in order to capture and describe those elements that were central to the experience of teaching in a kindergarten classroom. In this study, understanding should not be confused with an attempt to provide definitive answers to the study's research question. Instead, the final outcome of the study is concerned with the enhancement of meaning rather than certainty (Barone, 2001).

8.2 The Personal Dimension of Kindergarten Teachers' Work

The personal dimension provides insight into those aspects of kindergarten teachers' work that have remained largely unexamined. There is a strong association between the personal and professional lives of teachers (Lieberman & Miller, 1992; Nias, 1989). It is contended that the personal aspects of teachers' lives should also be examined as a component of their work. In this section, the reasons that each of the teachers entered the teaching profession and how they came to be teaching in kindergarten are discussed. An acknowledgement of the personal dimension associated with the work of kindergarten teachers also enables the meanings that the participants attached to their work to be considered, along with the beliefs that these participants held in relation to their work.

8.2.1 The Journey to Kindergarten

Each of the participants told different stories as they described the experiences and events that led to their entry into the teaching profession. While there were a number of differences associated with each narrative, there were also a number of similarities. The literature has suggested that individuals entered the teaching profession because it offered contact with young people on a daily basis (Huberman, 1993; Lortie, 1975). This was an important reason for Anastasia because she had a love of children and believed that teaching was a way that she could have contact with children on a regular basis. It is interesting to note that Sarah, Lucy and Sam did not mention this as an initial reason for entering the teaching profession although it was apparent during the time I spent in each of their classrooms that they enjoyed contact with children.

The ability of teachers to make a difference in the lives of the children they teach has also been provided as an important consideration in terms of why people entered the teaching profession (Morales, 1994; Lortie, 1975). The potential to influence the lives of children and make a difference in their lives were also central to the reason Anastasia offered for becoming a teacher.

In the literature, a number of individuals outlined that they had always wanted to be teachers (Cockburn, 2000; Dinham & Scott, 1996). While Sarah provided a number of reasons for entering the teaching profession, a central reason was that she had always wanted to be a teacher (p. 222).

It has also been shown that some individuals entered the teaching profession because they were not able to pursue their preferred profession, or when there was a lack of other employment options they sought employment as a teacher (Cockburn, 2000; Dinham & Scott, 1996). This, in part, could explain Sam's decision to enter the teaching profession. Although he did not specifically mention why he wanted to become a teacher in the first instance, he changed his mind from becoming a music teacher to training as a kindergarten teacher so that he could receive a studentship.

The opportunities that teaching provided to attend to other commitments, in particular those associated with having a family have also been recognised as

common reasons for entering the profession (Dinham & Scott, 1996; Lortie, 1975). While this may not have been directly attributed to the reasons that Sarah, Lucy, Sam or Anastasia became teachers, there are instances when the flexible nature of teaching in this regard was apparent. For example, Lucy, Sarah and Anastasia all left teaching at various times to have children and then returned. In addition, the holidays that teachers were entitled to were also a particularly attractive aspect associated with being a teacher (Dinham & Scott, 1996).

The salary paid to teachers was also highlighted by individuals in the literature as a reason for becoming a teacher (Dinham & Scott, 1996; Huberman, 1993; Lortie, 1975). This was particularly evident in the reasons that both Lucy and Sam provided for entering the teaching profession. However, salary was not the primary motivation, although the provision of studentship money made the decision to become a teacher more appealing.

Studentship money would be good (laughs); yeah I could do this for a couple of years. I guess I was really lucky, I just fell into something that I really loved doing and it was - just like pure coincidence (Lucy, p. 188).

The literature has suggested that individuals have also entered the teaching profession because of pressure from family members (Dinham & Scott, 1996; Lortie, 1975). This was of particular interest because for these participants, the influence of family members was not perceived as negative and proved to be a powerful influence in each teacher's decision to enter the profession. Sarah's mother featured prominently as she recounted her experience of becoming a teacher.

I always saw that she loved her job, and was very dedicated to it and so it made me become interested in it (p. 224).

In addition, Sarah's narrative highlighted the influence that personal experiences can have in shaping an individual's decision to become a teacher (p. 225). In terms of Sarah's decisions to enter the teaching profession, it was evident that her mother's influence and her own personal experience were vitally important and not only helped confirm her decision to become a teacher but also led her to making a conscious decision to specialise in kindergarten education.

The influence of a family member, which in Lucy's case was her sister, was central to her experience of becoming a teacher (p. 188). Even though Anastasia's decision to enter the teaching profession was predominately influenced by her desire to make a difference in the lives of children, it also reflects the influence of family members on her decision to become a teacher (p. 124).

In previous studies conducted with the intention of determining the reasons that individuals enter the teaching profession, the categories were pre-determined. For example, the study conducted by Dinham & Scott (1996) employed a questionnaire with seven items to which teachers answered true if that aspect was perceived to be an influence on their decision to become a teacher. It is argued that, in those studies, respondents may have felt inclined to provide responses that were included in the questionnaire rather than a response more closely aligned to their personal reasons for entering the teaching profession. The strength of the current study lies in the opportunity it provided each teacher to express personal reasons for entry into the teaching profession. Further, in-depth studies of a qualitative nature, would provide opportunities to examine whether the influence of family members and personal experience were applicable to a wider population.

The findings of this study suggest that these participants entered the teaching profession for a range of reasons and were influenced by a variety of factors. These included; the potential to have contact with children; the salary and holidays provided to teachers; and the potential teaching offered to attend to other commitments such as those associated with having a family. However, a common feature of the narratives provided by Lucy, Sarah and Anastasia was the influence of family members and personal contact with teachers and the education system in prompting them to enter the teaching profession.

8.2.2 Falling into Kindergarten Teaching

The participants in the study each came to teach in kindergarten having had a range of teaching experiences in early childhood education. While each participant had varied experiences, a common thread in each of their stories was that none of them had taught in classes above grade one.

There is an absence of specific literature that deals with why individuals choose to become kindergarten teachers. Sarah, spent time with an experienced kindergarten teacher in her classroom, and because of that experience had always wanted to be a kindergarten teacher. This emphasises the influences that direct personal experience can play on an individual's decision to enter the teaching profession or in this case, a specialised area. Lucy, Anastasia and Sam however, found themselves teaching in kindergarten through opportunities or circumstances that presented themselves, rather than deliberate career decisions.

Lucy had worked in prep and grade one classes until one year the school required a kindergarten teacher. This experience made Lucy realise that she loved working with kindergarten children. Central to her decision to teach in kindergarten was the opportunity to teach on a part time basis in kindergarten. This allowed Lucy to spend time with her family, thus highlighting the importance of the opportunity that teaching provides to fulfil responsibilities to other commitments such as having a family. Similarly, Anastasia also came to be teaching in kindergarten as the result of an opportunity that presented itself (p. 142).

The research literature suggests that individuals entered the teaching profession because it provided them with an opportunity to continue an association with a particular subject area (Huberman, 1993; Lortie 1975) or because they had enjoyed their own experience of schooling (Alexander et al, 1994). Sam may have wanted to continue his association with a particular subject area, in this case music. However, Sam enjoyed his kindergarten training and this influenced his decision to specialise in kindergarten education. Sam's description of how he came to specialise in kindergarten teaching also emphasises the role that circumstance played on his decision to become a kindergarten teacher.

In a round about way I sort of fell into becoming a kindergarten teacher, not through choice, but through the situation that I was in. When I got to college I did my double music major but I enjoyed the kindergarten training so much that I forgot about becoming a music teacher and just wanted to become a kindergarten teacher (p. 167).

In this sense, Sam wanted to continue an association not only with a particular subject, but also a particular type of education. Sam's entry into kindergarten

teaching could also be attributed to his enjoyment of the kindergarten training. This can be viewed as a form of personal experience, although slightly different in its orientation to the personal experiences of Sarah, and different again to the experiences of Lucy.

Given the specialised nature of kindergarten teaching, it would be beneficial to establish clear pathways through which individuals can complete kindergarten training and then placement in kindergarten settings. Without this approach to training, kindergarten teaching may well lose its focus on the whole child and a play based curriculum that utilises both the indoor and outdoor learning environments. A factor in such a situation is the potential for primary school curriculum and practices to move down to lower grades.

Present initiatives, which focus on recruiting and training teachers, may need to be reconsidered, especially if the influence of family members, personal experience or income play an influential role in the decision of individuals to become teachers. Further, the potential to make a difference in the lives of children has been a central theme in many campaigns utilised in faculties and schools of education. In this study only Anastasia mentioned this as a reason for entering the teaching profession. I suggest that the potential to make a difference in the lives of children may well have been implicit in the reasons Sarah, Lucy and Sam provided for why they entered the teaching profession.

8.2.3 Personal Meanings of Kindergarten Teaching

Central to the meanings that each of the participants attached to their work in kindergarten was the sense of satisfaction that they derived from contact with children and the opportunity to share in their development during the year. This aspect of teaching was identified in the literature as a source of satisfaction for teachers generally (Dinham and Scott, 1996; Nias, 1989) as well as kindergarten specifically (Richgels, 2003). However, the participants in this study felt that this was especially so in kindergarten because the extent of children's development was immense owing to their age. Anastasia described teaching in kindergarten as

rewarding although she acknowledged that this was a somewhat clichéd view (p. 135).

In reflecting back on the development that the children make over the course of a year, Sam recognised that this was not only a key aspect of his work but also a rewarding one (p. 178).

Lucy perceived the development that kindergarten children make in a similar manner.

You start off with these little dots, and by the end of the year they're their own people. I don't think you see as much in other grades, and that, I find that really satisfying. It's lovely to have got them that far. And, it's the same I suppose for all classes but I think especially kinder, that's just a real buzz, to see them and remember them at the beginning of the year. See how far they have come socially during the year (p. 220).

For Sarah, a particular incident in which one of the children commented that he had learnt to talk about his feelings emphasised the importance of her work as a kindergarten teacher (p. 251). The opportunity to work in kindergarten also provided Sarah with a sense of pride.

I've taught other early childhood classes so I know what it means to be a prep teacher and a grade one teacher and things like that as well. I feel proud of the kindergarten teaching side and I thoroughly enjoy this. I thoroughly enjoy kindergarten teaching. I suppose one of the things that I could say is that I feel really proud to be a kindergarten teacher (p. 239).

While each of the participants enjoyed working in kindergarten because of the role they were able to play in the development of the children and the personally rewarding nature of their work, they also suggested that it was hard work. For example, Anastasia perceived her work as extremely hard. This was partly attributed to the age of the children and the increased level of care that must be shown (p. 147).

The hard work associated with being a kindergarten teacher was also recognised by Lucy who had suggested that many teachers would probably not agree that it was hard work (p. 201).

The lack of understanding about the demands of working in kindergarten may account for the perception that teachers working in other year levels and the wider community believe that kindergarten teaching is easy. This would appear to be a misrepresentation of kindergarten teachers' work when the experiences of these participants are considered. In upper primary grades, children generally work at their desks either individually or in groups whereas in the kindergarten classroom the children occupy the whole learning environment with as many as ten or more activities operating simultaneously. For these reasons, the kindergarten program and the learning environment that is established in the classroom could be partly responsible for the number and diversity of the roles that kindergarten teachers adopt and the perception held by these participants that kindergarten teaching is hard work.

In this study, the participants described their work in kindergarten as hard although carrying out the work of a kindergarten teacher was also something that the participants perceived as a privilege. This view of teaching in kindergarten was apparent in Anastasia's descriptions of her work (p. 122).

Sarah, on the other hand, described her work as a kindergarten teacher as exciting, emphasising how lucky she was to be able to undertake work that she loves for so long.

I find it exciting. I still find it exciting, so I feel really lucky about that. I don't think that it's an easy job and I get really tired and worn out, but it's a really worthwhile job. I feel I have an impact on the children's learning and I think that's an important role that you're taking on. I think it's something that you get a great deal of pleasure out of, watching that progress in the kids (p. 224).

It is evident from the descriptions of teaching in kindergarten, that these participants viewed their work as hard but intrinsically rewarding and a privilege. This view was also portrayed in the work of Richgels (2003).

It would be beneficial to conduct further research in this area so that a greater understanding of the personal meanings attached to teaching in kindergarten could be ascertained. However, it should be noted that teachers working with children in other year levels may also describe their work in similar ways if they were provided with opportunities to describe their experiences in their own words. Additional research is

required in this area, not only with kindergarten teachers to determine whether these views of kindergarten teaching are consistent with a wider population of kindergarten teachers, but also with teachers more generally. This would provide opportunities to develop a better understanding of the nature of teachers' work from the perspective of those who carry it out on a daily basis.

8.2.4 Kindergarten Teachers' Beliefs

There appears to be an anomaly in the literature associated with teachers' beliefs. On one hand, there is a body of literature that suggests early childhood teachers hold varied beliefs about their work (Zeichner & Liston, 1996; Spodek, 1987). On the other hand, there is a view that teachers' beliefs have remained largely unexamined (Woodrow, 1999; Nespor, 1987). However, conflicting views associated with teachers' beliefs may well arise from limited quantities of research that have focused on early childhood and kindergarten teachers' beliefs.

In contrast to the view that kindergarten teachers hold varied beliefs, these participants held similar beliefs. The similarities in their beliefs were evident from the manner in which they described the programs they offer (pp. 203 & 237) and the roles they are required to adopt (pp. 125 & 194-195). In addition, there are other issues associated with kindergarten teaching about which these participants held similar beliefs. For example, they held similar beliefs in relation to the types of experiences they offer (pp. 150 & 200), a commitment to educating the whole child (pp. 172 & 242), and the role of play in the kindergarten program (pp. 180 & 226). It was also evident from the findings of this study that there was a high degree of congruence between the beliefs that were held by the participants in relation to their practice and what they actually did in the classroom.

One reason that was put forward in the literature to account for the differences in beliefs held by kindergarten teachers was the relative freedom of operation they have in their individual classrooms (Timperely & Robinson, 2000). While there were no major differences in the beliefs held by each of the participants, it was apparent that each of the participants had a high degree of freedom in terms of what they did in the classroom.

The similarities that are apparent in the beliefs held by these participants could be attributed to a number of factors. For example, it is possible that each of the participants underwent similar training. However, when the experiences of each teacher are examined in terms of their training it is evident that their experiences are varied. Alternatively, it is possible that each participant held similar beliefs because they are a relatively small and close-knit community of learners. Further, the Kindergarten Teachers Association is a common feature in the experience of the participants. This highlights the important role that the KTA plays in these teachers' professional work lives.

In light of the findings of this study, further research is warranted to determine whether teachers hold similar beliefs concerning kindergarten programs, the roles associated with kindergarten teaching and other issues associated with their work. If future research with a larger sample of kindergarten teachers were to show that kindergarten teachers do hold similar beliefs about their work, it would be necessary to reconsider a number of other ideas held in relation to the nature of kindergarten education. For example, one reason put forward to account for the low status of early childhood education is linked to the perceived absence of a knowledge base. The lack of a knowledge base has been attributed to varying beliefs held by teachers. If teachers do not hold varying beliefs, there may well be an established knowledge base and the low status attributed to kindergarten teaching could be the result of other factors, such as a lack of understanding of kindergarten education, rather than varying beliefs held by kindergarten teachers.

The personal dimension of kindergarten teachers' work represents an important and original contribution to understandings of kindergarten teachers' work. The findings of this study have a number of important implications for those involved in teacher education programs. Individuals who are training to become teachers should be provided with opportunities to examine the reasons that led them to enter the teaching profession and how their life histories have influenced such a decision. Through reflective experiences such as these, the attachment that individuals have with teaching can be interrogated.

In terms of how teachers enter the area of kindergarten education, the findings of this study have suggested that opportunities and circumstances play a more prominent role than deliberate career decisions. In Tasmania, there has been a trend toward generalisation rather then specialisation in terms of teacher education training. The specialised nature of kindergarten teaching requires individuals to be provided with specialised knowledge, skills and understandings, something that is not currently possible in Tasmania. This is cause for concern when the long term future of kindergarten is considered. As teacher education programs are becoming more general in orientation so too will kindergarten and early childhood education.

8.3 The Professional Dimension of Kindergarten Teachers' Work

The professional dimension of kindergarten teaching is concerned with those activities that teachers undertake in the classroom, school or the wider community as part of their work. It is important to acknowledge that the domains developed by Turney et al (1986) appear to be compatible with the work of these participants. However, the compatibility of these domains could be attributed to the global orientation of the terms and the subsequent goals that teachers are thought to pursue in each domain. In terms of this study, the focus of the professional dimension is specifically on the work of kindergarten teachers and the roles that they are required to adopt. In this section, the general and specific roles that kindergarten teachers are required to adopt are examined in detail. In addition, the kindergarten program and issues associated with its implementation are also considered in this section.

8.3.1 Kindergarten Teachers' Roles

The literature has suggested that the roles required of kindergarten teachers are varied (Branscombe et al, 2000; Ryan & Cooper, 2000; Gestwicki, 1997; Spodek, 1987). The observations and conversations with each of the participants revealed a similar pattern in terms of these roles. The varied nature of the roles of the participants and the environment in which they work, suggests that Hargreaves' (1994) "Intensification Thesis" is applicable to the work of the participants. However, it may

be that this is the result of the nature of working in kindergarten rather than a product of educational change. Alternatively, there may have been an intensification of kindergarten teachers' work brought about by changes in society and the increasing demands that are being placed on kindergarten teachers as they go about their work.

In this study, I found that the participants did not describe their roles in the same way as those found in the literature. For example, the literature presents the role of kindergarten teachers as including those of being a nurse, diplomat or storyteller. The participants' descriptions of their roles tended to be more closely aligned with the purposes of kindergarten education and specific roles that they undertake. However, it is important to note that the roles outlined in the literature were adopted by the participants. This was particularly evident during the classrooms observations that I conducted. I suggest that the labelling of kindergarten teachers' roles in terms of being a nurse or diplomat, rather than in terms of the purposes of kindergarten education trivialises the work of kindergarten teachers, something that has tended to occur in the literature.

The literature highlighted that one of the main purposes of kindergarten education was to orientate children to formal schooling (Moyer, 2001; Kostelnik et al, 1993; Spodek, 1986). This was also evident in the descriptions provided by the participants in relation to their roles. For example, Anastasia suggested that she introduced the children to the school rules, for example, putting up their hands and taking turns, concluding that she perceived her main role as providing children with a gradual *introduction* to school (p. 149). This view was shared by Lucy (p. 204) and Sarah (p. 253).

Sarah's descriptions of her role also acknowledged the changes that have taken place and the impact that these have had on the roles kindergarten teachers have been required to adopt. The literature has also recognised that as society has changed so too have the roles associated with the work of kindergarten teachers. For example, kindergarten teachers have been required to adopt such diverse roles as social worker and contact with the community (Surbeck, 1998; Stewart, 1986), for which they have no formal training, a point that was recognised by Sam.

The impact of the introduction to schooling on children's success later in their schooling was recognised by the participants. This is highlighted by Anastasia (p. 154) and also by Sam who suggested that:

If we don't do it properly then kids are going to have a bad attitude towards the rest of their schooling. So there are a lot of conflicts or problems associated with the area but I think that we need to maintain the unique nature of kindergartens (p. 173).

There is a perception that the purpose of kindergarten was and still is ambiguous (Cuthill et al, 1998). However, the participants in this study, through the discussion of their roles, demonstrated that they held a number of specific beliefs about the purposes of kindergarten education. More importantly, the beliefs they held about the purposes of kindergarten are consistent with one another. The perceptions that parents hold in relation to the purpose of kindergarten are also consistent with the purposes of kindergarten that are evident in the descriptions of kindergarten teachers' roles presented in this study. For example, parents perceived the main purposes of kindergarten to be in helping the socio-emotional development of children, school readiness and finally the development of educational or academic skills (Page et al, 2001).

The work kindergarten teachers undertake with kindergarten children is crucial, although the work that they undertake with the children's families is also vitally important (Willey, 2000; DETYA, 2000; Hughes & MacNaughton, 1999; Powell, 1989). The role of the kindergarten teacher in terms of working with families and introducing them to the school and its culture was recognised by Lucy (pp. 194 – 195) and also by Sarah.

As a kindergarten teacher, I believe one of our most important roles is to make the transition from home to school as smooth as possible for families as well as for their children. This isn't just about the kids. For a lot of parents it's their first child coming to school and trying to make them feel comfortable with school because some of them have got very negative attitudes towards school from their own experiences or feel that school's not a place that they need, you know, that they should be involved in or have anything to do with. I think that it's really important...that transitional stuff is a key role as a kindergarten teacher (p. 253).

It was of particular interest the emphasis that each participant placed on the work undertaken with families. Each of the participants identified this aspect of their work

as being as important, if not more important than the work undertaken with children on a daily basis, an issue captured by Lucy in the following comment:

[Helping] families as a whole is I think as important, if not more important, than what I do individually for children. Yeah, and that's - I think is probably what is so different about kindergarten teaching to other teaching. Because I don't think other classroom teachers have to do that (p. 222 - 223).

This was one of the most important roles that the participants believed they fulfilled. If they did not succeed in this area, there was the potential of long lasting consequences for the parents of these children. If done well, parents were in a position to maintain a positive association with the school. This was particularly evident in Anastasia's classroom where I observed her making parents feel welcome in the classroom (p. 138).

The participants also gained a sense of satisfaction from working with parents. For example, Sam thought that *working with whole families and being involved with groups of people rather than just individuals (p. 156)* was a particularly enjoyable aspect of his work as a kindergarten teacher. Lucy also derived a sense of satisfaction from the work that she does with families. This type of work was enjoyable because it provided her with variety in terms of her work (p. 185). Furthermore, it was not only the break from working with children that Lucy found satisfying, the development that the parents made was also a rewarding aspect of her work (p. 220).

The participants also identified a number of other roles as central to their work. These roles included keeping the peace and providing the children with an appropriate learning environment in which they felt both safe and secure. For example, this was evident in Anastasia's classroom in which she subtly intervened in children's disputes rather than telling them what to do (p. 133).

The participants also emphasised the role they played in helping children develop social skills. For example, Sarah indicated that helping children develop social skills was a major focus of her work as a kindergarten teacher (p. 238). In addition to specific social skills, Sarah believed it was important for kindergarten teachers to develop group cohesiveness because often the children have not been in groups as

large as those in kindergarten. Coupled with this, Sarah also provided the children with opportunities to get along with others in a group situation (p. 228).

Sam also recognised the importance of developing social skills and the ability to be independent and this influenced the way he perceived himself as a teacher. More specifically, the age of the children that he was teaching led him to place greater emphasis on social skills and other personal outcomes rather than academic outcomes such as the development of literacy skills. However, this was one role that was recognised by Sarah:

... a really big role in developing literacy and numeracy skills and, that the way that we go about that is what's important. ... Literacy and numeracy skills start from birth and they're developing and we do play an active role in developing those skills but the way that we do it is what's important. I do believe that we play a vital role in helping their families to understand the important role they play in developing those skills as well (pp. 240 – 241).

An emphasis on literacy and numeracy skills development in kindergarten may be perceived as a potential formalisation of the kindergarten program. For this reason, it is important to consider the way in which the experiences are presented to kindergarten children. In many instances, literacy and numeracy experiences are offered in meaningful and relevant ways (p. 240).

8.3.1.1 Planner

It is evident from watching each of the participants at work in their classrooms that they undertake considerable amounts of planning. However, this is one aspect of their work that tended to be brushed over or played down during informal conversations and interviews. Anastasia used the word "minimal" to describe her planning. However, Anastasia suggested that instead of planning she would, for example, rather consider *"How I am going to pose that question?"* (p. 130). This suggests that Anastasia does complete planning although much of it is not committed to paper and for this reason, she does not perceive what she does in this regard as planning.

The participants may not have specifically mentioned the planning they undertook as a kindergarten teacher because they did not see it as being as important as other aspects

of their work. However, a broad range of activities were offered in each of the kindergarten classrooms. In addition, the learning experiences were changed on a regular basis. It is possible to infer from these aspects of the kindergarten program that planning was an important aspect of kindergarten teachers' work that these participants undertook on a regular basis.

Sarah on the other hand believed that the planning undertaken by kindergarten teachers was considerable. The increased levels of planning that are undertaken in kindergarten environments can also be attributed to catering for the needs of each child. This aspect of planning in kindergarten was evident in Sarah's comments related to the high level of planning that must be undertaken when teaching two groups of children. Planning in kindergarten, according to Sarah, was not only greater than planning in other early childhood and primary grades because in some cases teachers can be planning for up to 45 children, but also because the planning is more individualised to take account of the individual needs of each child (p. 254). This has consequences for other work that Sarah is required to undertake. For example, she is required to write 45 reports and conduct a similar number of parent / teacher interviews. This according to Sarah, represents another important reason for maintaining the non-contact time of kindergarten teachers.

You're not only looking at individuals. You're saying, well these children have similar needs so there would be times where I would get those children together in a group and work on specific activity with them to help develop those skills. So it wouldn't always be them choosing and me working with where they come from. There are times when I would take them and work with them in a specific group on a specific activity (p. 243).

The participants provided children with a broad range of meaningful experiences that were tailored to meet the needs of the child. The individualised nature of planning in kindergarten was consistent with the literature (Fleet & Patterson, 1998).

In the planning process it has been recognised that children should be provided with an opportunity to have a say in the program planned (Fleet & Patterson, 1998). This was evident in each of the four classrooms, with participants demonstrating sensitivity to the needs and interests of the children, modifying experiences to capture the interests of individuals and at other times discontinuing learning

experiences or replacing them with experiences that the children had requested. In addition, each participant must have planned for a range of learning experiences because during each visit to the four classrooms, there was a broad and ever changing range of experiences from which the children could choose. This is also consistent with the views of the Kindergarten Teachers Association (1986) who outlined the importance of teachers planning a variety of experiences in both the indoor and outdoor environments.

There would be substantial benefits of further, more descriptive research in the area of planning in kindergarten. At present, little is known about the way in which kindergarten teachers undertake planning, or how planning is enacted in kindergarten classrooms. The findings of studies focusing on issues such as these could be used to inform kindergarten teachers about the types of planning that are being utilised in kindergarten settings as well as what constitutes planning in this environment.

8.3.1.2 Advocate

The advocate role has been recognised in the literature as important although one that is often overlooked (Catron & Allen, 1999). Kindergarten teachers have been called upon to adopt the role of advocate as a way of standing up for the needs of kindergarten children. Kindergarten teachers are also required to be advocates for the kindergarten program at school level and at a community level where they are able to educate others about the importance of kindergarten education in children's development as well as the needs of four and five year old children (Nyland, 2001; Branscombe et al, 2000; Moyer, 2001; The Department of Education, 1988).

In this study, each of the participants recognised the importance of adopting the role of advocate. In many instances, the participants perceived that other teachers at their school did not understand what occurred in kindergarten. They also felt that it was part of their work as a kindergarten teacher to educate other members of the school staff about the needs of kindergarten children. For example,

Many teachers have never taught kindergarten ... a lot of people just won't go down that far. They'll teach early childhood classes down to prep or they'll be a primary teacher. I think that some of them don't have a full understanding of what it means to

be a four-year-old starting school for the first time in your life and all the needs that you have. I think that it's really important for us to be advocates and explain and try to help other people understand what the needs of your age group are. I see that as a really important part of my role as a kindergarten teacher (Sarah, p. 235).

Lucy also recognised the role that kindergarten teachers play in educating other members of the school's staff about the importance of kindergarten education (p. 212). Sarah suggested that it was important for kindergarten teachers to be advocates for themselves (p. 254).

The participants also thought that it was important to ensure that the broader community had an understanding of what occurred in kindergarten and why it was an important stage of children's schooling. This aspect of the role is consistent with the literature which suggested that the teacher's role as advocate extends further than the community and includes policy makers and departments that are responsible for the administration of kindergarten programs (Arthur et al, 1996; Catron & Allen, 1999; Moyer, 2001).

In terms of kindergarten teachers' work, the role of advocate may also be necessary because of the low status that is commonly assigned to teachers who work in kindergarten. For example, this issue is made apparent by the need for teachers working in kindergarten to educate others about the importance of kindergarten education, something that would not, it is contended, be necessary for a grade six teacher to undertake. The lack of importance associated with teaching in kindergarten is illustrated by Lucy's story of the kindergarten being left out of the school photographs (p. 212).

Historically, early childhood and kindergarten teachers have been accorded a lower status than teachers working in other areas of education (Ebbeck, 1992; Petrie, 1992; Stonehouse, 1991). Unfortunately, this trend has continued.

Sometimes you feel challenged as a kindergarten teacher because your job is somehow not as important because you work with very young children and "you're only a kindergarten teacher" and I suppose one of the reasons that comes about is, "Well you don't need to know much in terms of academic knowledge, you wouldn't need to have high mathematical thinking or etc". I think you do have to have very high-level understanding of what it means to be this age and that whole range of developmental experiences that's needed. And it is very specific knowledge that a lot

of other people haven't got and so, I'd say that we do have to sometimes stand up and express that we're just as important as everybody else (Sarah, p. 239).

This view was also shared by Lucy who had suggested that other teachers do not see the work that kindergarten teachers undertake as being important (p. 219).

The findings of this study suggest that the role of advocate is an important component of kindergarten teachers' work. However, it has been suggested that kindergarten teachers have not traditionally done very well in satisfying this aspect of their work (Fleer, 2000). The findings of the study do not provide an indication of how successful the participants were at satisfying this role although the participants were very forthright about this aspect of their work and how important it was. It could be the case that such is the nature of working in kindergarten, teachers are required to adopt the role of advocate out of survival and to protect the integrity of kindergarten programs that are offered to four and five year old children.

Sam recognised that kindergarten teaching was held in low esteem, suggesting that that this may have occurred because other school personnel and the wider community did not understand or value play and the work of kindergarten teachers (p. 180).

The perception that kindergarten teaching is easy may have also contributed to the lack of status assigned to kindergarten teaching (Stonehouse, 1991). The literature has also outlined that the low status of kindergarten may be attributed to the variations within kindergarten programs and the difficulty this has caused in establishing a knowledge base for the field (Ott et al, 1990). However, this is inconsistent with the findings of this study in which the participants showed a great deal of similarity in their beliefs. It is also apparent from observations conducted in each classroom, that there are a number of similarities in terms of the day to day running of the kindergarten and the way in which the participants carried out their work.

The low status assigned to teachers working in kindergarten has created a number of problems. One which has serious consequences for the future of the profession is that teaching in early childhood settings has become an unattractive career option (Fleer,

2000). This was not the case in the past, as each participant saw early childhood as being a worthwhile place to teach and the teachers have continued to work in this area of education exclusively. Furthermore, the low status of early childhood education has other implications for those working in the area of early childhood. For example, the low status of the profession has led to the idea that teachers or principals with little or no knowledge of kindergarten education are able to make decisions on behalf of kindergarten teachers and their programs (Fleer, 2000). This issue is discussed further in section 8.4.5.

The perceptions that are held by the community and the media about kindergarten education and teachers working in kindergarten classrooms may also influence the low status associated with this area of education. This aspect was recognised by Lucy who suggested that at one point in time teachers were embraced as part of the community and perceived as special people.

But, there's not that opinion of teachers anymore, you know, we don't work hard enough and all that stuff that you read in the paper. So, it's nice when someone actually acknowledges that what you do takes quite a bit of skill and is really valuable (p. 223).

The literature has suggested that there is a vast difference between the depictions of kindergarten teaching in the media and the work that actually occurs in the classroom on a daily basis (Ryan & Ochsner, 1999; Swetnam, 1992). The representations of the work of teaching kindergarten children portrayed in the media have done little to dispel the stereotypes associated with working in kindergarten. It is contended that this has led to the work of kindergarten teachers being viewed in a stereotypical manner along with kindergarten education and teaching being described in stereotypical ways.

There is an obvious need for research in this area and despite calls being made for the past 20 years little has changed. It is vital that systematic research is undertaken to not only identify the knowledge base that exists in the field of kindergarten education, but also the perceptions that are held by other teachers and the wider community in regard to kindergarten education. It may be the case that the low status assigned to kindergarten teaching is a figment of the collective imaginations of those working in the field. If the low status is a product of stereotypical views of what

happens in kindergarten classrooms or a lack of understanding, then it is necessary to review the processes through which kindergarten teachers enact their roles as advocates.

8.3.1.3 Social Worker or Counsellor

The literature has recognised that kindergarten teachers acknowledge that part of their role is to provide support for parents in areas that are not directly related to kindergarten children (Renwick, 1989). It is clear that the role of social worker was central to the descriptions provided by each of the participants in relation to the roles kindergarten teachers are required to adopt. It was also evident that the role of social worker is something that the participants were required to adopt on a regular basis. The participants were required to deal with issues that included personal problems of the parents and children as well as social issues such as child abuse and divorce. These were consistent with those issues outlined in the literature (Ebbeck, 1991; Renwick, 1989).

In this study, the participants talked either directly or indirectly about the role of social worker that they are often called upon to adopt. The decision of whether or not to adopt the social work role is not always something in which kindergarten teachers have a choice. Kindergarten teachers are often the first point of contact and for this reason the role has tended to be thrust upon them (Ebbeck, 1991) despite having no formal training in relation to this aspect of their work. The lack of choice associated with whether teachers working in kindergarten adopt this role is recognised by Lucy:

I think again, all teachers have played this role [as a counsellor], but probably more so in kindergarten because of the way that the room is structured and the way our days are structured. There's more opportunities for people to come in and bare their souls to you, you know. They tell you all their problems, and break down on your shoulder and all those sorts of things. I guess a counselling course would be really handy for me. Actually one time I nearly did the lifeline one. I should - they sort of train you in listening and making all the right comments at the right time, which we're certainly not trained for but my goodness we do a lot of that. Yeah, that's nice to be able to do that, to feel that you're actually making a difference - that you help people - helping other adults (p. 220).

The comments made by Lucy concerning the adoption of the social worker role also highlights a view shared by these teachers that they have not received formal training in this area. This has specific implications for the training that is provided to kindergarten teachers. If the role of counsellor or social worker is a central feature of kindergarten teachers' work, it is logical that it should be incorporated into the training that kindergarten teachers receive or at least offered in the form of professional development. Anastasia, while talking about the work that she undertakes with parents, suggested that the counsellor or social worker role was important, particularly for those parents who may not have had positive experiences themselves at school (p. 138). The role of counsellor was also recognised by Sarah who suggests that kindergarten teachers often have to spend large amounts of time reassuring parents (p. 226).

In this study, it was found that the participants were required to adopt the role of social worker or counsellor in the course of their work with kindergarten children. I observed the participants working in this role on a number of occasions during the time I spent in their classrooms. For example, on a number of occasions Sam spoke with children about issues at home such as a parent leaving (p. 169).

Research has shown that teachers derive a sense of enjoyment from working with children's families although this was specifically related to those students and families who were, for some reason, experiencing difficulties at home (Dinham & Scott, 1996). In terms of kindergarten teachers' work, this was found to be an enjoyable element for Sarah, Lucy, Sam and Anastasia. However, there were also instances in which this aspect of their work was also described as challenging. Nias (1989) partly explains this dichotomy, describing teaching as a complete package and despite being a source of satisfaction, it also contains many stressful aspects. The duality of teaching was captured by Sam when he suggested that while dealing with children who had been abused was stressful, arriving at a positive outcome was a source of satisfaction (p. 158).

It has been suggested that because kindergarten teachers are required to adopt roles such as a social worker that this has led to a diversification of the roles associated with kindergarten teaching (Ebbeck, 1991). I am in agreement with Ebbeck (1991)

having found that kindergarten teachers are still required to adopt a diverse range of roles. It is highly likely given the changes that have occurred in society such as increases in family breakdown and economic instability, the diversification of kindergarten teachers' roles would be greater now than at the time of Ebbeck's writing.

The findings of this study indicate that there is a need for kindergarten teachers to be provided with formal training or professional development so that they are able to undertake this role, and others, in an effective and appropriate manner. In addition, further research that examines the types of issues that kindergarten teachers are required to deal with as they work in this role and the frequency that they are required to take on this role would be worthwhile. Information from studies examining this issue may point to other possible forms of intervention that could be provided for kindergarten parents who are experiencing difficulties in areas that are perhaps outside the boundaries of kindergarten teachers' work.

8.3.1.4 Facilitator or Intervenor

The term facilitator has been applied to teaching in many areas of education. However, the term facilitator has been extensively used in kindergarten and early childhood education (Gestwicki, 1997; Arthur et al, 1996; Bredekamp, 1987) to describe the role of the teacher in educating young children. This term was also used by Lucy even though she did not like the implications of the term (p. 213). Sam also talked about his role in terms of being a facilitator (p. 175). Sarah on the other hand, described her role as an interventionist (p. 230).

Both the term facilitator and intervenor were used by the participants to describe their role in the classroom. The term facilitator has been criticised and suggestions have been made that teachers need to adopt the role of intervenor so that social inequalities may be addressed (Ryan & Ochsner, 1999). It is apparent that the term intervenor, as it was used by Sarah, is closely aligned with the view of teacher as facilitator rather than being used as a means through which she was able to address social inequalities. Lucy's dislike of the term facilitator may be associated with the perception held by other teachers or the wider community that teachers working in

this role do little more than stand around, a view that is somewhat inaccurate if Roger's (1969) views of facilitator are adopted. Alternatively, it may be that the term "facilitator" has been around for so long as part of the constructivist perspective, that it has become "jaded" and means many things to many people. Despite the terms facilitator and interventionist being used in this study as a means of describing the teacher's role, it is not known whether this would be the case of kindergarten teachers more generally. However, it is highly likely that even if teachers did not use either of the terms outlined in this section, they would describe a similar way of working with children in the classroom.

8.3.1.5 Learner

The role of learner and attending professional development is of great importance for kindergarten teachers because it provides them with the opportunity to develop professionally as well as ensuring that children achieve their potential (Robert, 2000; Arthur et al, 1996; Kostelnik et al, 1993; Dean, 1991). It has been recognised that accessing professional development has been dependent on the individual initiative of kindergarten teachers (Robert, 2000). However, despite considerable levels of personal initiative on the part of kindergarten teachers, there may be additional barriers to accessing professional development that is suited to their needs. Anastasia suggested that leaving her kindergarten class to attend professional development was not easy because of the relationship that she develops with the children and also because of their age (p. 131). Perhaps this points to the need for professional development that is offered at times that are responsive to the needs of the kindergarten teacher.

In terms of the professional development that teachers require, there is a strong association between needs in this area and career stage (Huberman, 1993; Dean, 1991; Nias, 1989). While the participants in this study did not point specifically to the needs they had, during various stages of their career, many of the stories associated with their early teaching experiences included descriptions of support from infant mistresses and other teachers with whom they had contact. This may well indicate that kindergarten teachers require the support and guidance of someone who

has specialised knowledge and skills associated with kindergarten education early in their career. Access to this type of professional support is difficult in kindergarten because often there is only one kindergarten teacher at each school.

The role of professional associations has also been considered an important source of professional development. However, research findings suggest that a large number of teachers are not happy with the professional development that they have received from professional organisations (Dinham & Scott, 1996). This finding is somewhat surprising when the contact these participants had with a particular professional association is considered. In this study, three out of the four participants were actively involved in the KTA, with the fourth having previous involvement with the association. The KTA played a varied role in the professional lives of each of the teachers. Anastasia pointed to the opportunity to meet with other kindergarten teachers for professional development and discussions of issues associated with kindergarten education provided by the KTA.

The importance of contact with the KTA was recognised by Lucy. She suggested that the KTA provided kindergarten teachers with contact that was not possible at their own school because they were often the only kindergarten teacher working there (p. 222). Lucy described her involvement with the KTA as a lot of work although she gained a sense of satisfaction from this work because she was able to help other kindergarten teachers (p. 222).

Sarah was also committed to the KTA. In a number of conversations we had about the role of the KTA, Sarah outlined the role it is able to play in helping kindergarten teachers fulfil their needs for professional development and to also offer the opportunity to interact with other kindergarten teachers.

It is possible that the KTA provides a great deal of professional development and support to kindergarten teachers, a finding that is not consistent with the findings of Dinham and Scott's (1996) research. However, the loss of non-contact time would appear to be an important issue and something that must be addressed. This was an issue that Sarah thought needed careful consideration because in some schools that she is aware of, the kindergarten teacher's non-contact time has been eroded and they

were teaching on Friday afternoons in another part of the school Non-contact time is important for kindergarten teachers because in many instances, they have used this time to complete planning and conduct home visits to the kindergarten children in their classes (p. 254). In this regard, the loss of non-contact time is also associated with the status of kindergarten education. If kindergarten teachers continue to lose their non-contact time, they have limited opportunities to access professional development and support provided by the KTA. Further, kindergarten teachers will also have limited time to work with families and with children. In many instances, kindergarten teachers have used this time to gain further knowledge, experience or skills by consulting with specialist teachers or undertaking home visits. For example, kindergarten teachers are able to work with teachers in areas such as special education during their non-contact time.

The issue of non-contact time is also important in regard to the access that kindergarten teachers have to professional development and professional associations. It is important that kindergarten teachers are provided with opportunities to access the KTA and other forms of professional development. It would be beneficial to determine not only the needs of kindergarten teachers in terms of professional development but also to examine the ways in which access to these could be enhanced.

8.3.2 The Kindergarten Program

Sarah, Lucy, Anastasia and Sam all showed a strong commitment to the notion of educating the whole child. In this sense, educating the whole child was associated with providing experiences that helped each child develop physically, socially, emotionally and intellectually. The notion of educating the whole child is consistent with the literature (Moyer, 2001; Catron & Allen, 1999; Kindergarten Teachers Association, 1986). This was thought to be one of the main differences between kindergarten and other levels of education because as the child progresses, increasing emphasis is placed on the intellectual development of the child rather than a focus on all aspects of development.

The literature places considerable emphasis on the role of play in the kindergarten program (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2002; Sayeed & Guerin, 2000; Catron & Allen, 1999; Arthur et al, 1996; Smith, 1994; Education Department, 1988). In each of the four kindergarten classrooms children were provided with many opportunities to engage in free play, demonstrating its central role in the program, and indicating the level of importance that the participants assigned to play experiences to develop skills and understandings. The commitment to play demonstrated by the participants was also evident in a number of other aspects of their work. For example, considerable emphasis was placed on play as an important aspect of the kindergarten program as well as central to the work of kindergarten teachers.

It has been suggested that kindergarten programs are varied and that this has been the case since the early history of kindergarten in Australia (Wollons, 2000; Clyde, 2000; Kostelnik et al, 1993; Spearitt, 1979; Plummer, 1979). The kindergarten programs offered by these participants did not vary considerably despite the teachers carrying out their work in different contexts, with different groups of children and in full-day and half-day programs.

There were a number of similarities associated with the way in which each of the participants structured the kindergarten day, despite different terms being used to describe the program that the teachers offered. Sam utilised a continuous kindergarten program in the sessions that he offered (p. 159). Sam believed a continuous program allowed the kindergarten environment to closely resemble that of the children's home environments.

The way in which Sam defined a continuous program and the perceived benefits that such a program offered was consistent with the literature (Cole et al, 1990; Kindergarten Teachers Association, 1986). However, the term "indoor / outdoor program" was used by Sarah (p. 237) and Lucy (p. 203) to describe the programs they offered, despite no mention of the term in the literature.

Sam provided the children with the opportunity to choose whether they would work in the indoor or outdoor learning environment during all but the closing stages of the program. This was also something that Sarah and Lucy tried to ensure. However, this

was limited by issues of duty of care and the supervision that they were able to provide, an issue that was also recognised by Bosich (2000). Sarah overcame this problem by allowing the children to work on the deck, while Lucy alternated between the indoor and outdoor environment depending on where her assistant was at the time. The importance of access to both the indoor and outdoor learning environments is recognised by the literature (Carlson et al, 1999) although it does not provide information related to how this may be achieved. The descriptions of each of these participants at work and the programs that they offer, provides valuable insight into how kindergarten teachers can facilitate access to both the indoor and outdoor learning environments.

There are a number of similarities between the indoor / outdoor programs offered by Sarah, Lucy and Anastasia and the continuous program offered by Sam. This may well indicate that the indoor / outdoor program is actually a modified version of the continuous program with the main difference being the day being broken up by timetabling requirements. An example of this was evident in Sam's classroom where the children were allowed to eat at any stage during the session.

In addition, the descriptions provided by each of the participants about the programs they offered also reflected the broad purposes of kindergarten. For example, the continuous program described by Sam portrayed kindergarten as an educational program suited to the needs of four and five year old children. While the programs described by Sarah, Lucy and Anastasia also reflected this purpose, they acknowledged that kindergarten education was also a means through which children can be introduced to formal schooling and its culture.

Whilst, the participants in this study did not use the term developmentally appropriate practice, the programs they offered shared many of the elements outlined in the literature (Moyer, 2001; Bredekamp, 1987). For example, each participant demonstrated a commitment to the use of play, a focus on the individual needs of the children, and provided the children with a range of experiences that were active and meaningful.

The unpredictable and varied nature of teaching are considered to be satisfying for teachers along with the work that they complete in the classroom (Nias, 1989). These were sources of satisfaction for Anastasia who found providing a variety of activities, and doing a range of different things during the day, appealing. She also found the flexible nature of the kindergarten program enjoyable, *When we're outside during outdoor play, if we want to go and plant a little garden we've got time to do it. We get out our implements and we can go and do weeding or watering...(p. 128).* This was not something that Anastasia felt could or would occur in primary classrooms.

Each of the participants provided a program in which children were able to participate in learning experiences both individually and as a group within the indoor and outdoor environments. This was recognised by the Kindergarten Teachers Association (1986) as one of the main considerations in terms of providing an appropriate kindergarten program. The similarities between the literature developed by the Kindergarten Teachers Association and the participants in this study suggest that these views are still applicable. However, these similarities could also be attributed to the age of the teachers in the study, with younger teachers working in kindergarten possibly holding different views associated with the structure of the program.

In terms of the level of formality associated with the program that was offered by each of the participants, they were all situated at the informal end of the continuum (Catron & Allen, 1999). The program that Sam provided was the most informal, which is a characteristic of a continuous program. Sarah and Lucy also provided an informal kindergarten program. At first glance, it would appear that the program Anastasia offered was more formal in its orientation. However, it could be said that it was more formal than those provided by the other teachers, but it was still situated at the informal end of the continuum.

The use of the outdoor learning environment raises a number of considerations for the way in which kindergarten classrooms are designed. The issue of duty of care requires that kindergarten teachers are able to supervise the children at all times although the design of many kindergarten classrooms makes this difficult if not impossible. Research that focuses on access to the indoor and outdoor learning

environments and how teachers utilise these environments would be beneficial. It is important that teachers are able to provide access to both learning environments while at the same time fulfilling the requirements of duty of care.

8.3.2.1 Transition Programs

Another important aspect of the kindergarten program, and therefore kindergarten teachers' work, is the orientation sessions that kindergarten teachers provide for children who will be attending kindergarten the following year. Sarah, Lucy and Anastasia all offered transition or pre-kindergarten programs with the intention of orientating the children and their families to kindergarten and the culture of schooling, recognising the importance of this time in children's lives as well as that of their families (Dockett et al, 1999; Howard et al, 1999). The literature has suggested that the purpose of these programs is to help children make the transition from home to school and for parents to get to know the teacher and other parents (Dockett et al, 2002; Kindergarten Teachers Association, 1986). There were numerous occasions in which I observed pre-kindergarten children making adjustments to their behaviour to satisfy the requirements of the classroom environment such as not talking when other people are, and learning to share resources. In addition, the potential for parents to get to know one another through pre-kindergarten programs was highlighted during Anastasia's parent/child session in which the parents formed informal friendship groups.

It has been suggested that the organisation and conduct of transition or pre-kindergarten programs vary from one setting to another (KTA, 1986). In this study, considerable variation was also found in terms of the pre-kindergarten programs that were provided at each of the four research sites. In terms of kindergarten teachers' work however, these programs were perceived as being a central component of what teachers working in kindergarten are required to do. For example, Sarah suggested:

We run pre-kindergarten sessions where the children who are definitely enrolling for our kindergarten the next year get to come. When they're ready they can be left on their own. It's building up a familiarity with the school and the people that they're going to be working with here and just that getting the parents in here as often as possible in terms of the parent / child sessions so that they feel comfortable being

here. They meet other parents that are going to be here, and developing all those sorts of things (p. 252).

Anastasia ran a parent / child session on Friday mornings for children who would be attending kindergarten the following year. Lucy and Sarah ran pre-kindergarten programs in which the children and their parents participate in the normal kindergarten program that is provided (p. 192).

The variation that was evident in each pre-kindergarten program tended to be associated with the types of programs that were offered, when they were offered and how each of the teachers structured the pre-kindergarten experience. However, pre-kindergarten programs are not stipulated by the Department of Education as a formal requirement that must be undertaken by kindergarten teachers. In light of this, the type of pre-kindergarten program that is provided is left to the discretion of individual schools, which may account for the level of variation. Despite this, pre-kindergarten programs were recognised as a central activity associated with kindergarten teachers' work by these participants.

In the future, it would be useful to conduct research that examines not only the types of programs that kindergarten teachers provide children the year before they enter kindergarten but also when the program is offered and for how long. It would also be beneficial to evaluate the effectiveness of pre-kindergarten programs. This would provide kindergarten teachers with information concerning how they could offer these programs or make the programs that they currently offer more effective, and place kindergarten teachers in a better position to reap the benefits that transition programs offer (Howard et al, 1999).

8.3.2.2 Program Concerns

The participants felt the formal requirements of school and an increased emphasis on academic development had the potential to erode what was considered "special" about kindergarten education. The participants also felt that at times, the focus on the whole child was in danger of disappearing. A number of arguments have been advanced in regard to the formalisation of the kindergarten program (Moyer, 2001;

Bosich, 2000). While the formalisation of the kindergarten program was an issue that the participants were concerned about, the view was expressed that the formalisation of the program had not occurred yet but was something that needed to be considered.

The perception of a growing formalisation of the kindergarten program could be attributed to the lack of specialised kindergarten training that is provided in current teacher education programs in the sole training institution in the state. The lack of specialised training was highlighted as a challenge to the kindergarten community as well as an area of personal concern by Sam (p. 172).

Another area of concern related to the kindergarten program was the implementation of the Kindergarten Development Check (Department of Education, 2003). This was a source of both challenge and dissatisfaction for Anastasia and Sarah. Anastasia was happy to observe the children and did not have a problem with this process until required to label a child as being "at risk" (p. 144).

Sarah was also happy with the process of observing the children. It is likely that kindergarten teachers would be happy to undertake this aspect of the Kindergarten Development Check (Department of Education, 2003) because kindergarten teachers have used differing forms of observational techniques in the past. However, Sarah believed that *the kindergarten check put a lot of pressure on a lot of the teachers (p. 241).* One of the main difficulties Sarah had with the Kindergarten Development Check (Department of Education, 2003), which is comprised of sets of developmental markers, is that children are asked to perform a certain task to assess their level of competence in relation to each marker, a process that Sarah believes detracts from the comfortable experience that is commonly associated with kindergarten (p. 244).

Sarah was also concerned that the Kindergarten Development Check could or would lead to more testing at an earlier age, a practice that would distract teachers from the *real stuff which is about teaching and learning in the classroom (p. 244).* This view represents an acknowledgement and perhaps a commitment to developmentally appropriate practice, guarding against the potential formalisation of the kindergarten program.

8.4 The Social Dimension of Kindergarten Teachers' Work

The social dimension of kindergarten teaching is concerned with the interactions that take place between kindergarten teachers and the children they teach, and their parents, and between kindergarten teachers and other teachers, principals and senior staff members. Through an examination of the social dimension, it is possible to gain an understanding of not only the nature of the relationships that kindergarten teachers develop but also the implications that these interaction have for their work.

8.4.1 Interacting with Children

It is acknowledged the interaction that takes place between teachers and their students is not restricted to the area of kindergarten teaching and for this reason the discussion of this aspect has not been undertaken in great detail. However, it is contended the interactions that take place between kindergarten teachers and the children with whom they work have a number of unique characteristics.

While it is likely that all teachers care for their students and demonstrate this care in the classroom, the nature of the care and the way it is demonstrated by kindergarten teachers is unique. Nurturing and an ethic of care have been highlighted in the literature, as common characteristics of the interaction that takes place between children, and the teacher in kindergarten settings (Swick & Brown, 1999; Hargreaves, 1994; Nias, 1989; KTA, 1986). The findings of this study support such a view and are recognised by Sarah.

I think that the broader community sees kindergarten teachers in that role too and it expects that of us because we're taking over the role from the mother and the father at that stage. It's like for them letting go a bit more and they expect that they will provide that role and I definitely see myself as a nurturer and a carer, not just a teacher as such (pp. 251 - 252).

The types of relationships these participants established with the children they taught were also consistent with the literature (Hargreaves, 1994; KTA, 1986). The participants established relationships with the children that demonstrated they were loved and cared, indicating they would support them unconditionally. This point was

made particularly clear in Lucy's classroom when one of the children informed the class that she had not wet the bed for 14 nights and the class responded in a caring and supportive manner (p. 196).

Kindergarten teachers can engage in nurturing and caring interactions with the children by providing them with support, treating them with respect, getting to know them as individuals as well as providing them with experiences that cater for their needs (Catron & Allen, 1999; KTA, 1986). Each of these forms of interaction was evident in the classrooms of the participants (for example, see p. 156).

The ways in which teachers nurture and demonstrate a caring ethic toward the children they teach was consistent with the literature (Catron & Allen, 1999). The participants achieved this type of contact with children through physical contact with children, although this was usually, but not always restricted to those instances in which the children were upset. This was particularly evident in the classrooms of Anastasia, Lucy and Sam who all had children crying on a number of occasions when I visited their classrooms. In each instance, the participants placed their hand on the child's shoulder or took them by the hand, comforting them in the process.

It has been suggested in the literature that interaction with children was not only for the children's benefit (Lieberman & Miller, 1992). This was also evident in this study because the interactions that took place between these participants and children were major sources of satisfaction. For example, the interaction with children was an enjoyable aspect of kindergarten teaching for Sam because the children were spontaneous and enthusiastic. In addition, Sam also pointed out that

It's just that age group... the innocence, the independence and all that sort of stuff that goes with four year old children really impresses me. I wouldn't teach any other grade. I think it is one of the most rewarding jobs that you can do. I don't want to do anything else (p. 155).

The interaction with children and their humour was found to be a source of satisfaction for Lucy. *The kids are just so gorgeous that you can, have a laugh, not at them but with them, you know. I think that's the beauty of it* (p. 198).

The findings of this study suggest that a central component of kindergarten teachers' work is related to the interaction and subsequent relationships that teachers develop with children. These interactions are not dissimilar to the interaction between teachers and their students generally, apart from one major difference. The interaction that takes place between teachers and children in kindergarten is heavily influenced by an emphasis on nurturing and care. It is important that kindergarten teachers maintain this emphasis, particularly in relation to educating the whole child because without this type of interaction, the work of kindergarten teachers may be dramatically different. This view is based on the notion that one of the main differences between kindergarten education and education at other levels is that the focus is not predominately on the academic development of the children.

8.4.2 Interacting with Parents

The interaction that takes place between kindergarten teachers and the parents of kindergarten children has been examined in the section related to the role of the kindergarten teacher. However, there are a number of other issues associated with this type of interaction and how interaction of this nature is realised in the kindergarten classroom.

In this study, it was apparent that the participants viewed their relationship with parents as an important component of their work. The observations that I conducted in each kindergarten classroom revealed that the participants made a conscious effort to make parents feel welcome when they entered the classroom. In addition, the participants also utilised a range of techniques through which they could enhance the level of interaction they experienced with parents. This was consistent with the literature that suggested kindergarten teachers provided newsletters and ran parent help sessions through which interaction between kindergarten teachers and parents could be increased (Richgels, 2003; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2002).

In Lucy's classroom she also made sure that she was available for the parents to talk to her about anything that they may have concerns about in terms of their child's learning (p. 188). In addition, each of the participants looked for ways in which

parents could be included in the kindergarten program. A common avenue through which this was achieved was a parent help program (for example, see pp. 124 – 125).

Each of the participants commented on how they ensured the program was organised before the children and their parents arrived so that they had time to talk with parents on their arrival. This was reflected in the classroom practice of each teacher. In some instances the interaction was initiated by the kindergarten teacher with the intention of providing parents with information about their child and professional advice (See for example pp. 126 – 127). The teachers also initiated interaction with parents when parents appeared to be reluctant or unfamiliar with the classroom. This was particularly evident in Lucy's classroom as she welcomed parents of pre-kinder children (p. 194) and encouraged parents to participate in the parent help program that operates in her classroom (p. 195). At other times, the interaction was reciprocal in its orientation, that is the teacher or parent would initiate the interaction, usually engaging in general conversation such as Sam talking to parents about the cost of the local show (p. 155). In those instances that parents initiated the interaction, the purpose was usually to convey information about the child to the teacher (see for example p. 126). Parents also initiated interactions with teachers when they had a concern or question about their child's education or development (see for example p. 188). It is important that kindergarten teachers are aware of the frequency of the interactions that they have with parents but also who initiates these. A classroom in which there are only teacher-initiated interactions may point to parents feeling that they are not able to approach the teacher.

While the interactions that take place between kindergarten teachers and parents are perceived as important, they are not always easy and can at times be problematic (Hughes & MacNaughton, 1999) as there is no single model for working with parents (Willey, 2000). This may well be true, although in each of the kindergarten settings observed in this study, the participants all interacted with parents in similar ways. For example, this was particularly evident in the time that the teachers set aside at the beginning and end of each day for interacting with parents. The frequency of interaction between kindergarten teachers and parents has also been viewed as problematic (Mahmood, 2000). This was not found to be the case in this study. The frequency of interaction between the participants and parents was

something that appeared to be valued in each classroom, and that these participants did in a confident manner. The high level of interaction that takes place in kindergarten classrooms could be partly attributed to the relaxed nature of the program.

In the future, it may be worthwhile to conduct research, which not only examines the nature of the interactions that occur between teachers and parents in kindergarten settings, but also how kindergarten teachers encourage and manage these types of interaction. This will help to clarify whether interacting with parents is indeed a problematic aspect of kindergarten teachers' work.

8.4.3 Interacting with the Teacher Assistant

Despite a wealth of anecdotal evidence related to the relationship and interaction between kindergarten teachers and their assistants, relatively little has been written about this aspect of working in kindergarten nor has the kindergarten teacher assistant been the focus of research. One of the only sources that mentioned the kindergarten assistant portrayed them as 'para-professionals alongside the teacher, contributing to the planning of the program, the setting up of the total environment and actively participating with children, parents and other adults' (Cole et al, 1990, p. 11). The observations and interviews conducted with each of the participants demonstrated that the teachers and their assistants worked in similar ways to those outlined in the literature (Cole et al, 1990).

Anastasia had spent nearly 27 years working in early childhood classrooms by herself. The presence of another adult was something that she needed to get used to. Anastasia did not feel that she could pass on what she thought were her responsibilities to someone else. However, working with an assistant has taken on a different meaning for Anastasia as she regarded her assistant as her "*right hand*" (p. 132).

Lucy's initial impression of kindergarten assistants was very different to her first experience of working with an assistant. Lucy initially *found kindergarten aides a bit daunting, because they were always a bit older and always seemed very experienced*

and very bossy (laughs). I found them a bit intimidating I think (p. 186). However, Lucy's first experience with her own assistant changed her perceptions. *I really like working with another adult. I find teaching in a classroom on your own all day, quite isolating. I quite like having my aide there...(p. 186).*

It was evident from the observations conducted at each school that the participants used their assistants as a valuable component of the program. In many instances, the participants and the teacher assistants shared many of the same roles. For example, in Anastasia's classroom her assistant was used as both someone who could work with the children individually and in small groups as well as someone to organise resources for the classroom. Sam also utilised his assistant in this manner who spent a considerable amount of her time working directly with the children in either the indoor or the outdoor learning environments. Similarly, Lucy and Sarah also worked with their assistants in this manner. This contrasts with the traditional view of the kindergarten assistant as one who cleans up after the children.

The lack of literature or research associated with the interaction that takes place between kindergarten teachers and their assistant is a concern. If the interaction takes place in ways that have been outlined in this study, then the role of the teacher assistant is vitally important in the overall program. The absence of literature in this regard can be limiting because there may well be a lack of understanding associated with what kindergarten assistants should and should not be required to do or indeed, what is appropriate. It is highly likely that kindergarten teacher assistants are being asked to carry out tasks that are beyond their level of qualification. Further research in this area that outlines the nature of the relationships between kindergarten teachers and their assistants as well as how they work together in the classroom would be beneficial.

8.4.4 Interacting with Teachers

The relationships that teachers have with one another vary according to the values they share, the priorities that underpin their actions, and finally, work structures (Hargreaves, 1995). Kindergarten teachers hold different values associated with the program, the purposes of their program, in particular the focus on the whole child,

the emphasis on play, and work structures, when compared to teachers working in other year levels. For this reason, the elements outlined by Hargreaves (1995) would indicate that kindergarten teachers have to establish relationships with other teachers who share very little in common with them on a professional level.

Traditionally, teachers have not been provided with opportunities to work with other teachers on a regular basis (Hargreaves, 1994; Nias, 1989; Lortie, 1975), although they have had the opportunity to interact with one another in the staffroom during breaks. This interaction is important because it provides staff in primary schools with important support (Pollard, 1987). Unfortunately, kindergarten teachers have not been able to derive support from interaction with other teachers owing to the hours they work, with the program requiring that they take breaks at different times in the day to the remainder of the school's staff.

The participants pointed to a lack of contact with their colleagues because of the hours that kindergarten operates when compared to the remainder of the school (Bosich, 2000). This was recognised as a significant barrier to the participants interacting with other members of staff and a source of isolation from the school community. It was apparent from the observations conducted at each of the research sites that contact with the rest of the school community was something that these participants valued. In order to facilitate contact with school staff, the participants did things such as write the notices on the whiteboard in the school's staffroom. Alternatively, in order to pursue contact with colleagues, one participant made arrangements for her assistant to supervise the children during the recess and lunch break in the kindergarten playground. Whilst there is an issue of duty of care associated with such practices there would appear to be few other alternatives which increase the level of contact that kindergarten teachers have with the remainder of the school's staff.

The contact with colleagues that teaching offered was also found to be a satisfying aspect of teaching in a number of studies (Cockburn, 2000; Nias, 1989). In addition, there was a belief that teachers were likely to derive a sense of enjoyment from working with colleagues rather than working with children all day, everyday (Nias, 1989). However, this was not found to be the case in this study because the

participants felt that they had limited opportunities in which to interact with their colleagues on a regular basis. The isolating nature of kindergarten was recognised by Anastasia.

We keep different hours entirely. I don't get to see the other members of staff, only at the staff meeting...the only other time I get to see them is on a Friday recess and lunchtime. That is if parent-child finishes early enough and everything is tidied up and then I get to see them on a Friday recess (p. 122).

In addition to the timetable on which kindergartens operate, the physical layout and location of kindergarten classrooms was also found to be a barrier to interaction with other members of staff as well as a possible cause of the isolation faced by kindergarten teachers (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2002). This was particularly evident for Sarah who had to drive between campuses to maintain contact (p. 250).

The location of the kindergarten classroom in relation to the rest of the school was also recognised by Lucy as being a possible cause of isolation experienced by kindergarten teachers. *I think it's a very isolating job. You can be very isolated because so often your buildings not even part of the school ...(p. 189).*

Sam also recognised that the design of the kindergarten building could contribute to the isolation experienced by kindergarten teachers. In addition, Sam also identified this as a possible reason that may account for the lack of understanding of what occurs in kindergarten (p. 177). However, the isolation of teaching in kindergarten is lessened toward the end of the year when arrangements are being made for the kindergarten children who will be moving to prep the following year.

Then you often have a fair bit of negotiating and a fair bit of discussion with those teachers to make them understand that what you've been doing through the year is the stuff you should be doing for the four year old child and it's not necessarily aimed at making them ready for prep (Sam, p. 178).

There are a number of implications stemming from the isolation and lack of understanding of what occurs in kindergarten. For example, Anastasia recognises the consequences that this lack of understanding can have when school wide policies are being established because often kindergarten is not included (pp. 135 – 136).

The lack of influence that kindergarten teachers are able to have in their schools has also been recognised by research which has suggested that teachers feel dissatisfied with their work because they have a limited amount of influence over what happens in their school (Nias, 1989). This may be more of an issue for kindergarten teachers, as they tend to work in relative isolation from the rest of the school and therefore have less opportunity to influence what happens in their school's overall operation. Alternatively, this may be less of an issue for kindergarten teachers because they work in their own area of the school, and have a relatively high level of freedom in terms of the program they are able to offer. This is evident in comments made by the participants in terms of the flexible nature of the kindergarten day and the range of activities that they are able to offer.

A number of additional reasons were offered to account for the lack of understanding of the importance of what occurs in a kindergarten classroom. For these participants there was a concern over the lack of kindergarten specialisation, with early childhood being treated as one area, and kindergarten as part of that area also. Alternatively, kindergarten aged children themselves could also be seen as a reason for a lack of contact with the kindergarten.

In this study, the notion that young children, that is those of kindergarten age, were intimidating was apparent in a number of the descriptions provided by the participants about why there may have been a lack of contact between kindergarten and the rest of the school. What surprised me was the ease with which Sam (p. 177), Anastasia (p. 136), and Lucy (p. 219) were able to recall anecdotes portraying members of senior staff or other teachers who appeared physically scared of young children. Perhaps it is necessary to examine the perceptions that principals and senior staff hold of kindergarten-aged children as principals and senior members of staff have been seen to view kindergarten children as a threat or monster (Woodrow, 1999). If images of the child influence the way in which kindergarten teachers conceptualise their work (Fleet, 2002) then it is important to understand how principals view kindergarten children because it may also influence the way in which principals view the work of kindergarten teachers.

A central theme in the participants' descriptions of the isolating nature of their work, were that "other people" did not understand or value play and the beneficial learning that is able to take place through this medium. I use the term "other people" very loosely because in most instances the term "other people" was used in a way that could include other teachers, parents, senior staff or the wider community. Issues such as these may also account for the increased demands placed on kindergarten teachers in terms of their role as advocate and educating "others" about the value of play. Perhaps kindergarten teachers need to be provided with additional opportunities in which they are able to fulfil the role of advocate.

The findings of this study suggest that it is important for kindergarten teachers and other members of school staff to find ways in which they are able to interact with one another on a regular basis, enabling kindergarten teachers to receive valuable support from other teachers. This may lead to a reduction in the level of isolation experienced by kindergarten teachers while at the same time increasing the level of understanding held by other teachers about what occurs in kindergarten classrooms and why it is important.

8.4.5 Interacting with Principals and Senior Members of School Staff

Limited research has focused on educational leadership in early childhood settings (Boardman, 2000). Research suggests Tasmanian early childhood teachers are unhappy with the senior leadership provided within the early childhood section of the school (Boardman, 2000, 1999). In addition, it has also been shown that there is a lack of interaction between kindergarten teachers and their principals (Boardman, 2000, 1999) with the lack of interaction partly attributed to the formal organisation of the school (Lieberman & Miller, 1992).

One reason which may account for the lack of interaction between kindergarten teachers and their principals, as well as limited amounts of educational leadership, is that principals feel they do not possess an adequate knowledge of pertinent issues associated with kindergarten education (Stamopoulos, 1998). Alternatively, the

notion that principals and members of senior staff are intimidated by kindergarten aged children may also contribute to the low levels of interaction between kindergarten teachers and their principals. It may be that due to the inability of principals to relate to or understand the educational and developmental needs of young children, that they avoid the kindergarten classroom and subsequently the teacher. This is an important issue, because observations at each of the research sites revealed that the participants had limited contact with principals during times that other staff members may have contact. In addition, the observations also revealed there were only two occasions in which principals came to the kindergarten classroom.

The interaction that takes places between teachers and their principal is important (Lieberman & Miller, 1992; Dean, 1991). Further, research supports the notion that it is important for teachers in the early childhood section of the school to have the guidance, leadership and support of people who understand what it is they are doing on a day to day basis (Stamopoulos, 1998). The importance of being provided with support and educational leadership from someone who is knowledgeable about early childhood or kindergarten education was also evident in the findings of this study. However, Sarah believed that despite principals or members of senior staff not having the necessary knowledge associated with kindergarten education they were still in a position to offer support, albeit a different type of support.

You can work in a school for instance where your senior staff might be all primary based or phys ed teachers or whatever. I'm not saying that they can't provide support but they do not have the specific knowledge to provide you with the curriculum type support that you may need. So, they have to do other things like send you out to get support from other PD situations or other people or arranging class visits. But, you haven't got that on hand support that maybe we all had once (p. 246).

Each of the participants expressed a concern that principals and members of senior staff did not have an understanding of what occurs in kindergarten on a daily basis. This lack of understanding also spread to other areas such as staff meetings in which the teachers felt that kindergarten was given a low priority when compared to other grade levels. The findings of this study support the notion that often principals did not understand what happened in kindergarten and therefore were not able to provide appropriate leadership and the type of leadership that the participants required.

It is possible to infer from this study that kindergarten teachers require instructional leadership from their principals although without the necessary skills and specialised knowledge principals are often not in a position to offer this type of leadership. In the past, the educational leadership of the early childhood section of the school was the responsibility of the infant mistress, a figure noticeably absent in the research literature that addresses educational leadership in early childhood education.

The support and leadership provided by the infant mistress was an important influence on the early teaching experiences of both Sarah and Lucy. For example, Lucy provided the following description of her initial relationship with her infant mistress:

My infant mistress was a wonderful lady called June Sumner... She was the one that actually offered me the kinder job... I think that she was probably the person who got me really passionate about everything to do with teaching and I owe her a great debt... You could go to her and she'd help you or she'd roll in one morning and say, "try this" or "would you like this?". Yeah, I think that it was then that I really realised that I'd, I'd really picked the right job. Somewhere along the line I think that everyone needs a June Sumner (pp. 207 – 208).

Sarah's experience of working with an infant mistress also influenced her development as a teacher, in particular working with an infant mistress provided Sarah with a sense of confidence in her teaching (p. 227).

In this study, it is evident that infant mistresses were particularly valuable in terms of their ability to provide these kindergarten teachers with guidance and support generally, as well as specifically in terms of curriculum support.

The absence of the infant mistress in the early childhood section of the school has placed even greater pressure on principals to provide this type of support and guidance. However, action does not appear to be happening in this regard owing to a lack of understanding associated with what occurs in kindergarten classrooms and also the professional needs of teachers. It is important that pathways are created to better enhance the communication and interaction between kindergarten teachers and their principals so that principals can be educated about what occurs in kindergarten and teachers can provide them with an insight into what type of support they require. Alternatively, senior staff members who have a background in early childhood

education could be appointed to schools. This would provide not only kindergarten teachers, but also other early childhood teachers with leadership and support from an individual who has the necessary skills and understandings to do this, making leadership more balanced. However, even this is problematic given there has been such a strong push for teachers to be trained with generic teaching skills instead of specialised skills in a particular area of education such as kindergarten.

8.5 Summary of Chapter

In this chapter, I have proposed that kindergarten teachers' work be examined through a three-part model that is comprised of the personal, professional and social domains. The following sections of this chapter examine the key findings of the study under the headings of personal, professional, and social dimensions of kindergarten teachers' work.

8.5.1 The Personal Dimension of Kindergarten Teachers' Work

The participants in this study outlined a range of issues that influenced their decision to enter the teaching profession. However, the findings of the study have revealed that the influence of family members and direct experience were important aspects associated with the decision of these participants to enter the teaching profession. The findings of the study have also provided insight into why individuals enter the specialised area of kindergarten teaching. It would appear that on the surface, circumstances or opportunities are common. However, closer examination suggests that the reasons these participants entered the teaching profession in the first place are similar to their reasons for specialising in the area of kindergarten teaching. For example, being able to share in the development of children.

An aim of the study was to determine what it was like for these teachers to work in kindergarten classrooms. The findings have suggested that teaching in kindergarten was hard work although at the same time very rewarding for these participants. The participants enjoyed being part of the growth and development of children and their families and perceived this aspect of their work as a privilege. Perhaps the most notable difference between the level of satisfaction experienced by the participants

and teachers working with older students was the joy derived from being part of children's development at a crucial time in their lives.

This study has demonstrated that each of the participants held a range of similar beliefs about their work and about kindergarten education in general. It has also been revealed that participants' beliefs are consistent with their classroom practice. That is, they provide experiences to four and five year old children based on their beliefs about the types of experiences children need. However, it is also important to recognise that these findings could also be related to the professional experiences of each participant. The participants all worked in government schools in Northern Tasmania and shared a number of similar professional experiences such as their involvement with the Kindergarten Teachers Association. These factors could have contributed to the shared beliefs of the participants.

8.5.2 The Professional Dimension of Kindergarten Teachers' Work

The examination of the professional dimension of kindergarten teachers' work provided an insight into the roles that kindergarten teachers are required to adopt and the programs that the participants offered. The findings of this study have revealed that these participants adopted roles that can be divided into three categories. These are: roles associated with the purposes of kindergarten education; roles that are related to specific aspects of kindergarten teachers' work; and, roles that are general in orientation.

The participants described their roles in such a way that they reflected the broad purposes of kindergarten education. Therefore, a central element of these kindergarten teachers' work was that of adopting roles that allowed the purposes of education to be fulfilled. Introducing kindergarten children and their families to formal schooling and its culture was found to be a major source of satisfaction for these participants. In particular, the teacher's perceptions of the lasting consequences for children and their families if they were successful in fulfilling these roles were significant.

The study has also demonstrated that the participants were required to adopt a number of roles that were specifically related to conducting their work at the

classroom level. The number and complexity of the roles the participants were required to adopt suggests that kindergarten teachers' work is complex and diverse. The findings of the study have also shown that the participants were often required to adopt the role of social worker or counsellor. This was problematic because the participants had not received formal training to undertake this aspect of their work. This may indicate that the trend toward generalist, rather than specialist approaches to teacher education programs needs to be re-considered.

The study has also shown that the participants adopted a range of general roles as they completed their work in the classroom. However, there was one notable difference between the ways in which the participants described these roles when compared to the literature. The literature tended to trivialise the general roles that kindergarten teachers adopt, describing the roles as being concerned with tasks such as repairing toys, directing traffic or other limiting and misleading activities. The general roles adopted by the participants suggest that kindergarten teachers are concerned with the global development of children and undertake roles that emphasised this. For example, these teachers helped children develop social skills, aided in the development of academic skills and provided children with opportunities to become independent.

The participants provided kindergarten children with programs that were characterised by a commitment to educating the whole child through informal, play based programs that utilised the indoor and outdoor learning environments. The participants also indicated that they were responsible for the provision of pre-kindergarten programs. Thus, the findings of the study suggest that the provision of pre-kindergarten programs are an important element of kindergarten teachers' work although the nature of these programs varies considerably between each of the settings investigated in terms of their structure.

8.5.3 The Social Dimension of Kindergarten Teachers' Work

The study found that the relationships and interactions that take place between the participants and the children they work with is not that dissimilar to other teachers. However, it is apparent from the findings of this study that there is one important

difference. The interactions between kindergarten teachers and children is characterised by a strong sense of nurturance and care. This commitment to nurturing and care was particularly evident in the classroom environment that was established in the participants' classrooms. The interactions between the participants and the children are supportive, respectful and demonstrated that the participants valued each child as an individual and as a member of the kindergarten class. In addition, the opportunity that teaching in kindergarten provided these participants to interact and share in the development of kindergarten children was a major source of satisfaction associated with their work.

A core element of kindergarten teachers' work for these participants was the interactions that occurred between themselves and kindergarten parents. In some instances, these interactions were perceived as being as important, if not more important, than the work that the participants carried out with children individually. The interaction between the participants and parents were also viewed as a source of satisfaction. The commitment that these participants demonstrated toward interacting with parents also highlighted the importance that they placed on introducing parents to formal schooling and its culture.

The study also provided an insight into the nature of kindergarten teachers' interactions with parents. These kindergarten teachers utilised a number of strategies to enhance their interaction with parents. One of the more common strategies employed by the participants was the use of a parent help roster in which the parents would come in and work with the kindergarten children. In addition, the participants also made themselves available at the beginning and end of each session. The participants also provided parents with a variety of sources of information such as notice boards, signs and newsletters. This served to open up interaction and communication while at the same time letting parents know about what was happening in the kindergarten and what children learnt as a result of various experiences provided in the kindergarten environment.

In terms of the interaction between the participants and their assistants, this study has shown that the kindergarten teacher and teacher assistant work together sharing a number of the same roles in the kindergarten classroom such as interacting with the

children, planning and facilitating. The interaction that takes place between the kindergarten teachers and their assistants was also found to be a source of satisfaction for these participants because it provided them with a break from working solely with children all day, every day.

It appears that the participants had limited interaction with other teaching staff at their schools. The limited level of interaction also extends to the contact that the participants had with their principals and members of senior staff. The lack of interaction may be attributed to the physical location or design of the kindergarten building. The structure of the kindergarten day has also been highlighted as a factor that has contributed to the apparent lack of interaction between kindergarten teachers and other members of school staff. In addition, a "fear" of small children may also be a contributing factor.

The study has also revealed that participants experienced high levels of isolation. The isolation of kindergarten teachers from their colleagues, principals and senior members of staff, was found to have a number of implications for the work of these participants, particularly in terms of the support and the educational leadership they received. The isolation experienced by the participants also had implications associated with the level of influence they were able to have over school wide policy development or other issues affecting the school generally. However, the findings of this study suggest that the participants, because of their isolation from the rest of the school have higher levels of freedom in their respective classrooms.

In terms of kindergarten teachers' work and the educational leadership that these participants received, the infant mistress was a noticeable absence. The educational leadership that infant mistresses were able to provide kindergarten teachers in the past was attributed to them possessing the necessary skills and understandings related to kindergarten education by several participants. In light of the findings in this area, it is apparent that kindergarten teachers valued the support and educational leadership that they once received from the infant mistress.

The three-part model developed through this study, which interrogates the personal, professional and social dimensions of kindergarten, provides a unique perspective on the work of kindergarten teachers. The model provides opportunity to understand kindergarten teaching from the perspective of kindergarten teachers, demonstrating the unique nature of their work. This study has provided an alternate representation of kindergarten teachers' work, one that moves away from stereotypical, limiting or misleading views of what occurs in kindergarten classrooms on a daily basis. Instead, kindergarten teachers' work has been portrayed as being both complex and diverse. Whilst developed in the context of kindergarten teachers' work, the three-part model developed through this study offers possibilities for the examination of teachers' work in general, and the interrogation of taken for granted understandings associated with the work of teachers in all sectors.

An epilogue in which I provide a personal insight into what I have learnt through this research journey follows this chapter.

Epilogue

The aim of this study was to gain an understanding of the nature of kindergarten teachers' work through an in-depth examination of the work of four kindergarten teachers in Northern Tasmania. In this chapter, I shall outline what I have learnt about the nature of kindergarten teachers' work. I shall also identify a number of key areas associated with kindergarten teachers' work and kindergarten education generally that would benefit from further research.

What is the nature of kindergarten teachers' work? The question reverberates in my mind. I have spent a considerable amount of time examining what four kindergarten teachers did on a daily basis in their classrooms, trying to make sense of their work and what it meant to them. What can I say about the nature of kindergarten teachers' work?

I found that the teachers in my study entered the specialised area of kindergarten education through serendipitous circumstances. This surprised me, as I had always thought teachers would make a career decision to become kindergarten teachers. I had not considered how powerful the influence of family members and direct personal experiences with teachers and education were in terms of motivating individuals to enter the teaching profession. Thinking of my own experience, an Aunt had warned me against making a decision to enter the teaching profession, I did it anyway. Maybe there were other things she communicated about teaching that served as a more powerful message about teaching as a career. Amusing anecdotes of classroom life and stories associated with times she brought about significant changes in the lives of her students were not made less influential despite constant reminders about the number of unpaid hours of work she was required to undertake and the never ending marking.

I was initially interested in those aspects of their work that kindergarten teachers found rewarding as well as those that were challenging. In addition, the meanings that kindergarten teachers attached to their work were also an interest of the research. I now believe these three elements are interrelated and the meanings that

kindergarten teachers attach to their work reflect the rewards and challenges that they encounter in the classroom. From what I had seen in the four kindergarten classrooms, kindergarten teaching appeared to be demanding. The teachers were constantly on the go from the time they arrived at the school to the time they left. The teachers told me this was the case, although they were quick to inform me that the work was very rewarding. It provided them with opportunities to welcome children and their families to school and introduce them to its culture. However, teaching in kindergarten was more than just rewarding. According to these teachers it was a privilege that they were able to share in the development of children and their families. I was rather disappointed to learn that these kindergarten teachers thought that other teachers, principals, parents and the wider community did not understand or respect the work that they did or the value of kindergarten education.

I quickly learnt that kindergarten teaching, while very rewarding for these teachers, was not without its challenges. The times that I spent with each of these teachers made one of the challenges more apparent. In some instances, the kindergarten teacher and I would sit in an empty staffroom eating our lunch. They would have been eating alone had I not been there. I also noticed the low levels of interaction that took place between the kindergarten teachers and other school personnel. They had told me about how isolating kindergarten teaching could be, although it was not until I started to focus on the lack of interaction that these teachers had with their colleagues that I realised how common this was. The same could be said about the contact that kindergarten teachers have with their principal or members of senior staff. Principals and members of senior staff did not make regular appearances in the kindergarten, and when they did, it was brief.

Whilst I was aware of the diverse roles that these participants were required to adopt, the conviction with which the kindergarten teachers conveyed these aspects of their work to me was unexpected. They smiled, nodded and spoke with a hushed voice as they provided details as to why the roles they adopted, roles that reflected the purposes of kindergarten, were important. These kindergarten teachers were passionate about their work, which was also evident as they described the sense of privilege that they felt and the rewards that working with four and five year old children provided.

As I spoke to the kindergarten teachers, I quickly got the feeling that these kindergarten teachers took their role as advocate very seriously. This was something that was important to these teachers. They saw that their role was to educate other teachers, parents, principals and the wider community about the importance of kindergarten education and the needs of four and five year old children. I wondered why these teachers were so committed to this role. Maybe it had something to do with the low status that has been assigned to kindergarten teaching or their perceptions that others do not value the work they do.

Walking into the classrooms of these teachers was an experience in itself. They provided programs that catered for the individual needs of four and five year old children. The room was active, full of movement, noise, children played. These teachers were committed to educating the whole child, they were not only interested in children's academic development. Learning was not restricted to the classroom. The children were provided with opportunities to work outside, individually, in small groups and as a whole class, just as they had been in the indoor environment. I think the opportunities to learn in both the indoor and outdoor environments, the flexible nature of the day and the focus on play were the factors of kindergarten the teachers were referring to when they said that the filtering down of primary school curriculum and practices could lead to the loss of the special nature of kindergarten education. It would be a great shame were this to occur, although it is a real possibility with the formalisation of school, the lack of specialist training for kindergarten teachers, and reduced opportunities for kindergarten teachers to access professional development and contact with professional associations such as the Kindergarten Teachers Association.

To the untrained eye, the kindergarten classroom may not resemble an environment that is conducive to learning. The classrooms, in most instances were busy, noisy places in which the kindergarten teachers adopted informal teaching roles. The teachers described their role in the classroom as being that of a facilitator or intervenor through which they provided children with a range of experiences, with the intention of extending children's skills and understandings.

I was interested in the planning that kindergarten teachers did. I was sure that they must do a lot of planning because in many instances they are responsible for two groups of children and provide a range of activities in the classroom that cater for individual needs. However, when I asked the teachers about the planning that they did, they played it down. Had I asked the right questions? I am not sure, although I was and still am certain, after having spent time in kindergarten classrooms, that kindergarten teachers do undertake high levels of planning. It may be that much of the planning is not committed to paper, perhaps a product of years of teaching experience.

In this study, I have learnt that kindergarten teachers' work is vitally important. First, it is important in terms of providing educational programs that are appropriate to the individual needs of four and five year old children. Second, the work of kindergarten teachers is also important because they fulfil another function that is as important as the work they do with children. Kindergarten teachers are the first port of call for families when they embark on the journey of education with their children. It is kindergarten teachers through the work that they do, who introduce parents to formal schooling and its culture.

In relation to the study's research question "What is the nature of kindergarten teachers' work?" I have learnt that kindergarten teaching is diverse, complex and multilayered. I have also found that, as unfortunate as it is, kindergarten teachers and the work they do are often not understood, valued or respected by other people within schools and the wider community.

If I had to single out the most important lesson that I have learnt about kindergarten teachers' work, it would be that I would be a kindergarten teacher should the opportunity present itself. I consider that an important statement. After all, I realise kindergarten teaching is hard work. I would be required to adopt a range of roles, some of which I would not have had any formal training to fulfil. I would not have a great deal of interaction with other school personnel. The educational leadership that I would receive is likely to be inadequate to satisfy my professional needs. Why then would I want to be a kindergarten teacher? If you could have heard the voices of these teachers as they talked about their work, you would realise the attraction.

Listening to these teachers as they told me they loved their work and that there was nothing else they would rather do convinced me. The experience convinced me that kindergarten teachers' work was important, not only for four and five year old children but also for their families and the individuals who carry out that work.

I found the research approach developed for the study to be personally rewarding while at the same time it served to challenge a number of notions that I held about the role of the researcher and the subsequent relationships that are established with participants. At times, the research experience was intensely personal. After all, these teachers shared aspects associated not only with their professional lives but their personal lives as well. This heightened my awareness of the relationship that I had developed with these teachers, one that would not have been possible without the methods and techniques utilised in the study. This was made particularly apparent during the interviews when the teachers had asked me whether they were able to talk about an issue, and it occurred to me that I was perceived to have power over them, even though this was something that I wanted to avoid. I was faced with the choice of marginalising the experiences of these teachers or providing them with a voice, an opportunity to talk about their experiences. I chose the latter. I enjoyed the freedom and the interaction that I was able to have with the participants that this type of research offered, an experience that I am keen to repeat.

In this thesis I have argued that limited research has been conducted in Australia that focuses on kindergarten education or the work of kindergarten teachers. This study represents an important beginning, an initial step, although there is still a long way to go in the journey. There is a definite need for additional research in the area of kindergarten education and kindergarten teachers' work. I have put forward a number of recommendations for future directions in research in the previous chapter although there are also a number of key areas that would benefit from further inquiry.

In the future, it would be valuable to conduct research that addresses:

- The purposes of kindergarten education from the perspective of a range of stakeholders. These groups may include: kindergarten teachers; parents; principals; and, the wider community.

- The nature of kindergarten programs that are provided for four and five year old children.
- The training that kindergarten teachers receive.
- The purposes and structures of pre-kindergarten and transition programs that are offered to children the year before they are eligible to enrol for kindergarten.
- The use of indoor and outdoor learning environments in kindergarten.
- The frequency and quality of educational leadership provided to kindergarten teachers.
- Kindergarten teachers' work in other contexts, not for the purposes of replication but to gain deeper understandings of the phenomena.
- The beliefs held by kindergarten teachers.

Research that utilises the personal, professional and social dimensions of kindergarten teachers' work that were proposed in the previous chapter would be beneficial. Such a move would lead to an even deeper understanding of kindergarten teachers' work, and could also provide greater insight into how other kindergarten teachers working in Tasmania, different states of Australia or other countries perceive their work.

The findings of such studies may help to educate teachers, parents, principals and the wider community about the importance of kindergarten teachers' work and the benefits of kindergarten experiences for four and five year old children. Additional research may also help to raise the status of kindergarten teaching through the provision of information that counters stereotypical views of kindergarten teaching as well as helping to establish a knowledge base for the field.

Last Words

I have learnt a great deal about the nature of kindergarten teachers' work. I am grateful for the opportunity that undertaking a PhD has provided me to share the work of these kindergarten teachers with a wider audience. The process of conducting a PhD has been one of the most academically challenging, frustrating, isolating and rewarding experiences of my education thus far although I know it is

only the beginning. I am still idealistic, just as I was at the beginning of my journey. The research experience has done little to satisfy my desire to share the world of kindergarten education and the experiences of kindergarten teachers with others. If anything, I am more committed to act as an advocate for kindergarten teachers and their work.

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